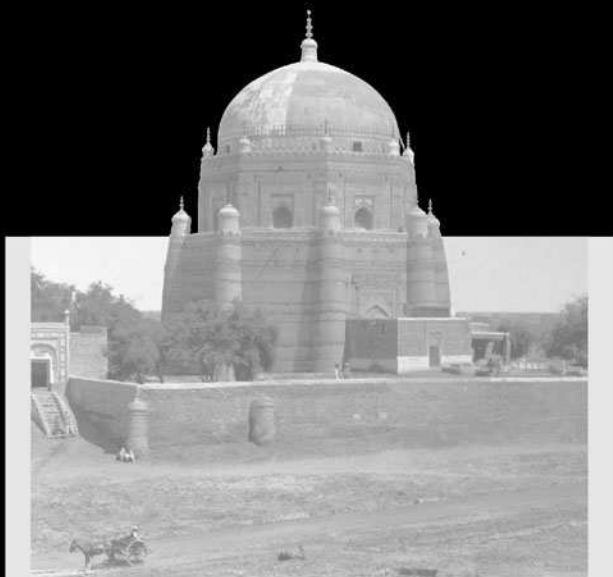


AL-HIND

The Making of the Indo-Islamic World

VOLUME III

Indo-Islamic Society
14th–15th Centuries



ANDRÉ WINK

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THE MAKING OF THE INDO-ISLAMIC WORLD
VOLUME III

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THE MAKING OF THE INDO-ISLAMIC WORLD

BY

ANDRÉ WINK

Professor of History
University of Wisconsin, Madison

VOLUME III

INDO-ISLAMIC SOCIETY

14th-15th CENTURIES



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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Duarte Barbosa</i>	M. Longworth Dames (ed.), <i>The Book of Duarte Barbosa: An account of the countries bordering on the Indian Ocean and their inhabitants, written by Duarte Barbosa and completed about the year 1518 A.D., 2 Volumes</i> (New Delhi, 1989).
<i>FFS</i>	A. Rashid (ed.), <i>Futūḥāt-i-Fīroz Shāhī</i> (Aligarh, 1949).
<i>FS</i>	A. M. Husain (ed.), <i>Futūḥ as-Salāṭīn of ‘Iṣāmī</i> (Agra, 1938).
<i>IM</i>	A. Rashid (ed.), <i>Inshā’-i-Māhrū</i> (Lahore, 1965).
<i>KF</i>	M. W. Mirza (ed.), <i>Khazā’īn al-Futūḥ of Hazrat Amīr Khusrau Dihlawī</i> (Calcutta, 1953).
Pires, <i>Suma Oriental</i>	<i>The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires: An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to Japan, written in Malacca and India in 1512–1515, 2 Volumes</i> (New Delhi, 1990).
<i>TA</i>	B. De (transl.), <i>The Ṭabaqāt-i-Akbarī: A History of India from the Early Musulman Invasions to the 38th Year of the Reign of Akbar by Khwajah Nizāmuddīn Ahmad</i> (New Delhi, 1990; or 1939).
<i>TF</i>	<i>Ta’rīkh-i-Firishta</i> (Lucknow, 1864). Two volumes in one; second volume indicated <i>II</i> .
<i>TFS</i>	S. Ahmad Khan (ed.), <i>Ta’rīkh-i-Fīroz Shāhī of Ṣīā’ ad-Dīn Baranī</i> (Calcutta, 1862).
<i>TFSA</i>	<i>Ta’rīkh-i-Fīroz Shāhī of Shams-i-Sirāj ‘Aṭfī</i> (Calcutta, 1888).
<i>TKJ</i>	S. M. Imam ad-Dīn (ed.), <i>The Tārīkh-i-Khān Jahānī wa Makhzan-i-Afghānī of Khwajah Nī‘mat Allah, 2 Volumes</i> (Dacca, 1960–2).
<i>TMS</i>	M. Hidayat Hosaini (ed.), <i>Ta’rīkh-i-Mubārakshāhī of Yahya bin Ahmad bin ‘Abdullāh as-Sirhindī</i> (Calcutta, 1931).

- TS* M. Hidayat Hosaini (ed.), *Tārīkh-i-Shāhī (also known as Tārīkh-i-Salāṭīn-i-Afāghāna) of Aḥmad Yādgār* (Calcutta, 1939).
- ZN* M. Abbāsī (ed.), *Zafarnāma of Sharaf ad-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī, Volume II* (Teheran, 1336/1957).

PREFACE

The research on which this book is based was done largely during the academic year 1997–98, which I spent as a Fellow at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) in Wassenaar. I am immensely grateful to the staff at NIAS for the efforts they made to facilitate my research, and to the Rector, Henk L. Wesseling, for encouraging me to apply and making this such an intellectually rewarding year. I would also like to thank the NIAS and Wim Stokhof, of the International Institute for Asian Studies, for funding a small international conference on Nomads in the Sedentary World in July 1998 at Leiden, which, for me at least, clarified some of the issues dealt with in this book.

The book was completed during the Fall semester of 2002, at the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) in Princeton, where I was generously supported by the Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro Membership. I would like to thank the faculty of the School of Historical Studies not only for approving my application but also for providing quite stimulating company during many lunches and occasional dinners. I particularly benefited from numerous conversations with Patricia Crone.

Between Institutes, I received considerable research support from the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin, including a sabbatical in the Fall of 2001. I presented outlines and chapters of the book during seminars in Madison, as well as in lectures at a great many universities in the U.S., Europe and Asia. Over the years this allowed me to considerably sharpen some of the arguments, while forcing me to abandon others. For this I must thank all the audiences that attended these seminars and lectures. In addition I would like to acknowledge a debt to Leonard Hochberg for stimulating my interest in geography; to Jan Heesterman for his sensitive commentary on some of the ideas I develop here; to Silvia Montiglio for some of the classical references and generous criticism; and to Anatoly Khazanov for numerous discussions on nomadism. Finally, my thanks are due to Lynne Miles-Morillo for her editorial work.

Madison, WI
May 2003

INTRODUCTION

This volume begins with a broad outline of some of the main geographical features of the Indian Ocean area and attempts to show in what essential ways these differed from the Mediterranean and Europe. Thus, Chapter I focuses attention on the role of rivers, river plains, and deltas. It proposes that the presence of a large number of major river systems is the most important characteristic of the geography of the entire region. Alluvial river plains and deltas provided the agricultural settings for the major Indian Ocean civilizations from early times. Reaching deeply inland, rivers locked land and sea into a highly differentiated but coherent political economy of exchange. Following the Indian Ocean coastline, the chapter analyses the inland connections and functional roles of major riverine and coastal subregions from the Zambezi in East Africa and the Swahili coast to Ethiopia and Eritrea, the great plains of the Tigris and Euphrates, the Panjab, the Ganges-Yamuna Doab, the Bengal delta, the Indian peninsula, and the Irrawaddy, Chao Phraya, Tonle Sap, Mekong, and, finally, Indonesia. Chapter I concludes that a second important feature of rivers in the Indian Ocean area is to be found not in the hydraulic demands they made on the state but in their hydrological instability. Environmental change associated with river instability, soil erosion in alluvial plains, earthquakes, and delta formation, was pervasive. The Indian Ocean was, for this reason, an area of environmentally disrupted human settlement, of lost rivers, lost civilizations, and lost cities. No hydraulic effort on the part of the state could ever change this basic geographic factor. Environmental change was largely beyond the control of man.

Against this backdrop, the second chapter proposes that medieval Indian Ocean cities were characteristically fragile, lacking in continuity, and relatively undifferentiated from an overwhelmingly agrarian context. 'Labile rurbanism' is another fact of historical geography that set the Indian Ocean apart from the Mediterranean and Europe. The instability of Indian cities, while primarily due to geophysical and hydrological factors, was enhanced by demographic volatility associated with the monsoon climate and the generally very high mobility of the Indo-Islamic ruling elites. Hence, it is argued here,

the Indian city as such was not a privileged source of social change nor the site of a precocious economic rationality.

Instead, as Chapter III proposes, some of the major sources of change were to be found not in medieval cities but on the frontier of the settled society of the river plains: in the deserts and steppes of the arid zone stretching from North Africa to Central Asia and into the Indian subcontinent, as well as in the maritime world of the Indian Ocean itself. This chapter identifies these geographic spaces as the 'nomadic frontier' and the 'maritime frontier' respectively, and argues that they have much in common, since both fostered movement and had great potential for resource mobilisation. Together they constituted the 'frontier of mobile wealth,' of nomadism, of raiding and long-distance trade, and of precious metals. Both the nomadic population of the arid zone and the seafaring population of the coasts and islands eluded the territorial grid and hierarchy of settled society and were therefore regarded as illegitimate. But the Indo-Islamic world was the result of the fusion of the people and modes of organization of the frontier of mobile wealth with those of the settled societies of the river plains. As a transitional area between the arid zone and the humid tropics, the Indian subcontinent was ecologically unsuitable for extensive pastoral nomadism and, while it was exposed to conquest movements by post-nomadic people, it was not subjected to widespread nomadisation. The new Islamic horse-riding elites imposed more effective fiscal measures on settled society and enhanced its commercial and financial capacity. They mediated between sedentary investment and the mobilisation of resources of military entrepreneurs, pastoralists and mercantile groups. Likewise, the same centuries that witnessed the rise of post-nomadic politics saw the rise of maritime people, an increase in naval warfare and piracy, and the emergence of new coastal centres throughout the Indian Ocean. These too were drawn into the orbit of Islam and these too were characterized by a high degree of the unregulated competition that was representative of the new age of commerce.

The final two chapters describe and analyse in more detail these two types of Indo-Islamic political formations of the medieval period, viz. the post-nomadic and the coastal/maritime empires, that emerged on the interface of frontier and settled society. Chapter IV, on 'post-nomadic empires,' argues that the Mongols, like earlier nomads throughout history, have been unable to establish empires in the monsoon climate of Hind. As long as they practiced nomadism, they

were constrained by insufficient pasture land. Thus, Mongol armies venturing across the Hindu-Kush had to remain on the move and then return to their pastoral habitats. Timur's expedition of 1398 was the final demonstration that the ecological conditions of Hind posed insuperable limitations to nomadic penetration. The Indo-Islamic empires of the eleventh to fifteenth centuries were, as this chapter attempts to show, not the creations of nomads but of post-nomadic military elites who migrated into Hind from the arid zone and left their nomadism behind but retained their horsemanship and control of horse imports. Such elites of nomadic origin included Turks, Afghans, Khalajīs, Ghūrīs, Tājīks, as well as Mongol converts, and other groups of a variety of ethnic origins from across the Islamic world and as far as East Africa. As post-nomadic conquerors, such people often developed local connections by marrying Indian wives, and they created the Indo-Islamic empire of Delhi and its regional offshoots in the Deccan, Bengal, Jaunpur and elsewhere. In the regional Indo-Islamic empires, Indian converts and non-converted Indians played a larger role than in Delhi itself, but even here post-nomadic elites from outside the subcontinent continued to dominate. Similarly, the new dynasties of the peninsular Hindu empires of Warangal and Vijayanagara were highly militarised post-nomadic political formations with indigenous roots among highly mobile pastoral groups in the ecologically marginal zones. Their rise, like the rise of the Indo-Islamic states, epitomises the increased importance of the arid zone which is in evidence everywhere. The chapter culminates in a more general analysis of the condition of post-nomadism that appears to characterise all major political formations of the Indian subcontinent of the period. This condition comprised a high degree of military mobilisation, with a heavy reliance on relatively small contingents of mounted archers that were extraordinarily mobile. The post-nomadic empires had few or no formal and enduring institutions, relied on peripatetic sovereignty, arose and disintegrated almost instantaneously, and consisted of multiethnic horse-warrior elites who were recruited from the frontier with cash and whose dynastic continuity was in constant jeopardy. Concomitant with the high degree of militarisation, the enslavement of non-Muslim subjects appears to have been a significant factor in the conversion to Islam. But, straddling the worlds of the nomadic frontier and monsoon agriculture, the main challenge of the post-nomadic empires was the raising of land revenue from an unconverted Hindu peasantry. The

difficulties of revenue collection were aggravated by the regularly recurring droughts which were a feature of the monsoon climate—another major environmental scourge of medieval Hind.

Chapter V establishes the connection between long-distance maritime trade, coastal societies and Islam in the Indian Ocean. Expanding in the context of a maritime trading boom, Islam became the common denominator on all coasts of the Indian Ocean. A number of major maritime and coastal configurations emerged between East Africa and the Sulu archipelago, specializing in different trading products that were either obtained from their own hinterlands or from overseas. They were polyglot, multiethnic frontiers, stimulating the rise of diaspora communities and migration and settlement over great distances. Even though their relationships with the inland states varied a great deal, politically these coastal communities had in common that they were integrated by the networks of interests and the constraints generated by commercial society. They were like the post-nomadic empires of the subcontinent in the sense that they were situated on the interface of settled society and the frontier of mobile wealth. In making this argument, the chapter provides a detailed analysis of the trading world of the Indian Ocean on the eve of the arrival of the Portuguese.

CHAPTER I

FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN TO THE INDIAN OCEAN: MEDIEVAL HISTORY IN GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE¹

It is widely acknowledged that Orientalist notions of political economy were marred by geographic determinism. From Marx to Wittfogel, generic concepts such as the 'Asiatic mode of production,' the 'hydraulic state' or 'Oriental despotism' involved simplistic observations relating to climate and, particularly, the presence of large rivers and alluvial plains which were invoked to explain essential and persistent differences with the West.² Considering its overwhelmingly important role in this earlier literature, it is remarkable that the historical geography of the rivers and river plains of the Indian Ocean has not yet been explored in any depth. It is perhaps to avoid being stung by charges of determinism that historians of India and the Indian Ocean area in recent decades have, if anything, downplayed the importance of geography. And, as W. A. McDougall has recently argued, it appears as if current thinking in general has become 'suspicious of a subject [geography] that emphasizes distinctions among regions, invites unflattering comparisons and hierarchy among nations and cultures, and has been used in the past as an intellectual tool of empire.'³ By and large, what K. N. Chaudhuri observed in 1978 still holds true: 'There can be few aspects of Indian studies more neglected than that of historical geography.'⁴ One of the major aims

¹ Parts of this and the following chapters were published as an article, with the same title, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 44 (2002), pp. 416–45.

² Cf. R. Inden, 'Orientalist Constructions of India,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 20, 3 (1986), pp. 422–3.

³ W. A. McDougall, 'You can't argue with geography,' Essay excerpted from a paper commissioned by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation as part of the History-Geography Project for publication in the *Middle States Yearbook* 2001; on the neglect of geography, see also E. W. Fox, *History in Geographic Perspective: The Other France* (New York, 1971); E. G. Genovese and L. Hochberg (eds), *Geographic Perspectives in History: Essays in Honor of Edward Whiting Fox* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

⁴ K. N. Chaudhuri, 'Some Reflections on the Town and the Country in Mughal India,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 12, 1 (1978), p. 77. In two later works, *Trade and Civilisation*

of this volume is to re-introduce a geographic dimension in the history of the Indian Ocean area—one that is not overly deterministic and helps to account not only for continuities but also for changes in social and economic organization over an extended period of time.

RIVERS, PLAINS AND DELTAS

From the point of view of geography—taking our cue from the older literature—the Indian Ocean does provide a sharp contrast to the more familiar world of the Mediterranean. The ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean did not follow the course of big rivers—with the exception of Egypt, which followed the Nile. The Greeks and Romans knew mostly short rivers, along the Tyrrhenian coast up to the Arno, and along the Adriatic.⁵ A typical Mediterranean river is relatively short, suffers from great seasonal variability in its water flow, and is navigable only near its mouth. The one major river in Italy, the Po, whose basin includes the widest and most fertile plain in the Mediterranean, is difficult to navigate because of sandbanks.⁶ The Rhône, rising in the central Alps, is the only major river which has its origin in non-Mediterranean Europe and flows directly into the sea.⁷ Generally speaking, the ancient Mediterranean was vitalized by constant movement along shores and sea-lanes, but not along rivers. It was a milieu of relatively easy seaborne communications (as described in the early Greek *periploi*) which coexisted with a quite unusually fragmented topography of the sea's coastlands, peninsulas and islands.⁸

What is striking in the lands of the Indian Ocean—this too is generally agreed upon—is the great variety and abundance of river landscapes along an immense coastline, running from the Zambezi in

in the *Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1985) and *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1990), Chaudhuri made some attempts to remedy this situation, but they are faint.

⁵ See M. Grant and R. Kitzinger (eds), *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome, Volume I* (New York, 1988), pp. 104–6; P. Squatriti, *Water and Society in Early Medieval Italy, A.D. 400–1000* (Cambridge, 1998).

⁶ Grant and Kitzinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 104–5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁸ See P. Horden and N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 2000), pp. 5, 30.

East Africa to the Euphrates and the Tigris, to the Indus and its tributaries, the Ganges and the Yamuna, the Brahmaputra, the rivers of the Indian peninsula, and, beyond, to the Irrawaddy, Chao Praya, Mekong, the Solo and the Brantas, and other rivers in its eastern parts. Even more striking is that many of these rivers are of extraordinary magnitude and reach deeply inland. In sharp contrast to the Mediterranean, most of the civilizations that arose in the Indian Ocean area from protohistoric and ancient times onwards were typically alluvial river plain and delta civilizations. The names of rivers are among the most ancient and persistent in the area. Human settlement generally followed the shifting courses of the rivers, and maps of stone-age sites along the large rivers show vestiges of palaeolithic occupation.⁹ The Indus-Saraswati or Harappa civilization (fl. 3000–1500 BC) exemplifies how in protohistoric times the first urban centres in India, as in Mesopotamia and Egypt, arose on the banks of very large rivers, while the various agricultural and pastoral societies that developed in many parts of the subcontinent in post-Harappa times were also essentially based on rivers. The Rigveda speaks of the ‘seven rivers’—of which the Saraswati was pre-eminent—as the ‘givers of life.’ Rivers in general were regarded as sacred, and the word *tīrtha*, which was used for a place of pilgrimage, literally meant a ford in a river.¹⁰ Rivers gave rise to a distinctive iconography and appeared frequently in representations on coins from as early as the third century B.C. For the ancient Indians probably no features of the landscape had greater significance than did rivers.¹¹ And the major urban centres of the ancient period were located on the banks of rivers, both in the Gangetic valley and in the peninsula.¹²

From these early beginnings onwards, rivers remained of the utmost importance in India and throughout the Indian Ocean for agricultural development and irrigation. The seed-yield ratios of these river basins were far higher than those of medieval European soils, allowing

⁹ Cf. B. Subbarao, *The personality of India: a study in the development of material culture of India and Pakistan* (Baroda, 1956), pp. 63, 70; J. Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde, Avant la Révolution des Transports, Tome II, La Voie d'Eau* (Paris, 1980), pp. 8–9.

¹⁰ J. B. Harley and D. Woodward (eds), *The History of Cartography, Volume 2, Book 1: Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies* (Chicago and London, 1992), p. 311.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² M. S. Mate, *A History of Water Management and Hydraulic Technology in India (1500 B.C. to 1800 A.D.)* (New Delhi, 1998), p. 123.

for much higher population densities, and providing an environment which was quite unlike that of the marginal Mediterranean lands.¹³ River irrigation achieved prominence as a means to sustain large populations where monsoon rains were seasonal and erratic, in particular outside the equatorial belt. Rivers were also important because many of them served as communication links and trade routes, and hence to bridge the distance between inland population centres and seaports. The majority of the largest rivers had excellent navigability, most of all those of the northern Indian plains. Even though these rivers would normally deposit vast amounts of alluvial material in their beddings, and their seasonal variation was considerable, they benefited both from the monsoon rains and from melting Himalayan snow, which attenuated the dry season.¹⁴ The Indus and the Ganges, like the most important rivers in other parts of the Indian Ocean region, were avenues of great traffic for many centuries. The rivers of the Indian peninsula are much more irregular than those of the northern plains, and their navigability has correspondingly been more limited.¹⁵ But even where these were not navigable traffic would follow the course of the rivers. Some of these rivers, like the Narmada and the Godavari, still have sections of a hundred kilometres or so which are as favourable to navigation as the rivers of the north, and these allow the use of barges, whereas elsewhere on these rivers we find raft navigation.¹⁶ In the peninsula, at the same time, the limited navigability of the rivers is to some extent compensated for by coastal traffic—as it is in certain of the island archipelagoes of the Indian Ocean. Wherever navigation was possible without too much difficulty, transportation by water was cheaper and more convenient than transportation by land.¹⁷ Water transport, using thousands of locally available boats, often in combination with bullock trains, was also a mainstay of military campaigns, particularly for the conveyance of bulk supplies.¹⁸ During the

¹³ On the inferior fertility of European soils, see E. L. Jones, *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 8; on the marginality of the Mediterranean environment, see Horden and Purcell, *op. cit.*, pp. 178 ff.

¹⁴ Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, p. 6, and note 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, note 2.

¹⁸ See, for instance, *TFS*, p. 231; *TFSA*, pp. 198–9.

rainy season, rivers could easily turn into obstacles for military campaigning, and the assembled armies would at times glower at each other for months from opposite banks, but they were rarely impassable.¹⁹ Rivers were the first 'ramparts of Hindustan,'²⁰ but boat-bridges could be constructed, sometimes in a matter of days, while fording was often successfully attempted at certain advantageous spots (the location and strategic value of all fords of the major rivers being well-known), and lines of elephants could be used to break the force of the waterflow, or to carry baggage, treasure, soldiers, wives, courtesans, and campfollowers across.²¹ We just as often read of ferries being used, even during the rainy season, and numerous floating devices such as rafts, leather baskets and inflated skins, and of armies swimming across rivers, with their horses.²²

A third and final major function of rivers in many parts of the Indian Ocean littoral was that they compensated for the lack of natural deep-water harbours.²³ The littoral ports were almost all exposed to the tide and sea, while in the Red Sea and parts of Indonesia the approach to existing ports was obstructed by coral reefs. The situation was worst on the eastcoast of the Indian subcontinent, where there was no natural protection at all. On the westcoast, conditions were more favourable in the Konkan, due to the presence of rocks, islands and small gulfs, which penetrated deeply into the interior.²⁴ Goa, and later Mumbai, as well as other harbours on this section of the coast, were well protected. But almost everywhere else we observe, from ancient times onwards, that seaports had to be located at the mouths of rivers or river channels. Only here ships could take refuge and find protection against the tide and bad weather, often at some distance from the open sea.

¹⁹ E.g., *TFS*, pp. 218–19; *TF*, p. 286; *TF*, II, p. 118; *TA*, p. 461.

²⁰ W. Davy (transl.), *Political and Military Institutes of Tamerlane, Recorded by Sharfuiddin Ali Yezdi* (Delhi, 1972), p. 47; H. M. Elliot and J. Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, 8 vols (London, 1867–77), III, p. 395.

²¹ *TF*, p. 155; *TF*, II, p. 350; Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, III, pp. 408, 412, 433, 477; *TFS*, pp. 246, 301; *TFS*4, p. 111; C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti (eds and transl.), *Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah*, 4 vols (Paris, 1853–58), III, p. 354.

²² *TF*, pp. 309–10; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 355, 359; Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, III, p. 420; and cf. Ch. Masson, *Narrative of Various Journeys in Belochistan, Afghanistan and the Panjab*, 4 vols (orig. London, 1842–44; reprint Karachi, 1974–77), I, p. 174.

²³ Cf. Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, pp. 42–43; Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, pp. 161–2.

²⁴ Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, pp. 42–43.

THE 'LOST' CIVILIZATIONS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN:
ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE, GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

Archaeologists have produced new data on fragments of the Indian Ocean world which survived from very early times. Most significantly perhaps, their efforts have sharpened our awareness of environmental change associated with river instability, soil erosion, earthquakes and delta formation, and this, in its turn, has led to the realization that India is a land of 'lost' cities and 'lost' rivers, of the violent obliteration of entire civilizations by natural disaster.²⁵ Much more than anywhere in the temperate zone, geomorphological change appears to have been pervasive in the vast alluvial river lands and deltas all around the Indian Ocean.

For this reason, the historical study of the Indian Ocean is, to a considerable degree, the study of changing landscapes, and here not only archaeology but also hydrology and geology are indispensable auxiliary sciences. Geomorphological change is in evidence wherever we follow the Indian Ocean coastline, and numerous difficulties are encountered in attempts to merely trace the names of places, of towns and river estuaries in the amphibious world of the seaboard as well as in the alluvial plains inland. Hence it is not merely the medieval legendary sources that present difficulties for the historian, but even the more recent and prosaic accounts of sea voyages by Portuguese, English or Dutch merchants.

This can be illustrated when we attempt, for instance, to reconstruct the itinerary of the first Dutch ship in the Persian Gulf (an inner sea of the Indian Ocean) in 1645, from the published journal of its captain, Cornelis Roobacker.²⁶ The Dutch ship can be followed quite easily, until it approaches the Shatt al-'Arab, in southern Iraq, from which point the route becomes unrecognizable. It becomes

²⁵ See for instance V. N. Misra, 'Human Adaptations to the Changing Landscape of the Indian Arid Zone During the Quaternary Period', in: J. M. Kenoyer (ed.), *Old Problems and New Perspectives in the Archaeology of South Asia* (Madison, 1989), pp. 3-20; B. Allchin, 'Early Man and Environment in South Asia, 10,000 B.C.-500 A.D.', in: R. H. Grove, V. Damodaran and S. Sangwan (eds), *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia* (Delhi, 1998), pp. 33-44.

²⁶ A. Hotz, 'Cornelis Cornelisz Roobacker's Scheepsjournaal Gamron Basra (1645); De Eerste Reis der Nederlanders door de Perzische Golf; Uitgegeven, met Inleiding en Noten', *Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Aardrijkskundig Genootschap*, Tweede Serie, Deel XXIV (1907), pp. 289-405.

abundantly clear that this enormous delta has changed tremendously since the seventeenth century. For one thing, since Roobacker's journey the Bahmishir river, which gave access to Basra, has become almost entirely unnavigable. For another, the coastline has moved up no less than sixteen kilometres. Areas that Roobacker described as deep sea have become sandbanks, while his sandbanks have become land. And we can extrapolate that transformations of the same order have in fact been going on for millennia. Over the last three millennia alluvial deposition has added more than a hundred miles of land in the area.²⁷ In even earlier times, the Persian Gulf extended all across what later became Mesopotamia ('the land between the rivers') and now consists entirely of alluvial river deposits.

The silting-up of the deep-water channels of rivers and the retreat of the sea was one form of environmental change affecting the historical development of Indian Ocean civilizations throughout history. Of even more pervasive impact was the general instability of rivers everywhere, particularly because the changes resulting from river shifts were often abrupt rather than gradual. River instability and hydrological disorder, of course, are not phenomena that are unique to the Indian Ocean area, but the enormous digressions that occur here on a regular basis certainly do not have their equivalent in the Mediterranean,²⁸ and not even in the Netherlands (where, in any case, the rivers have been tamed by dikes). It is well known that the hydrographic map of the alluvial plains of North India has changed dramatically. There is not a river in the Indo-Gangetic plains that in historical times has not changed its course a hundred times over, not infrequently with catastrophic consequences. This makes it hard or impossible to identify the sites of numerous places.²⁹

The causes of such river instability are multiple and show considerable regional variation.³⁰ Surface erosion is particularly intense in areas of soft alluvium which have alternating wet and dry seasons,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

²⁸ For environmental mutability in the Mediterranean, see Horden and Purcell, *op. cit.*, esp. p. 6; Squatriti, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–72.

²⁹ See especially H. G. Raverty, *The Mihran of Sind and its Tributaries* (1892) (Lahore, 1979 reprint); W. H. Arden Wood, 'Rivers and man in the Indus-Ganges alluvial plain', *The Scottish Geographical Magazine*, XL (1924), pp. 1–16.

³⁰ Cf. Arden Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 8; Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, p. 11; E. H. G. Dobby, *Southeast Asia* (London, 1950), pp. 48–50, 55–56, 383; D. N. Wadia, *Geology of India* (London, 1953), pp. 54, 388–9.

areas affected by monsoon rains. Here, alterations in the courses of rivers are the consequence of vast amounts of silt being deposited in their beds and raising them to the level of the surrounding flat countryside. Erosion and the resulting very heavy silt load of rivers in the wet season also gave them a great capacity for rapidly building up deltas, depositing sediment in the estuaries, and thus block harbours. Every large delta of the Indian Ocean shows frequent migration of distributaries, and old channels in various stages of abandonment are found at every river mouth. In Indonesia volcanoes add to the problem, when unconsolidated ash is washed into the rivers and spread out over the estuaries. As a result, the Solo river in Java carries about sixty times as much sediment as the Rhine, although it is sixty percent shorter.³¹ The Solo and Tjimanoeck deltas of Java extend outward, into shallow seas, at a rate of a hundred meters annually. But even without volcanoes, such rivers as the Mekong and Irrawaddy annually add to their deltas at a rate of sixty meters or more.

North India is well known for its seismic instability, associated with mountain building. This sometimes results in violent earthquakes, of a type that is already reported by Strabo.³² The alluvial sheet between the Indus and the Ganges river systems is not level and still subject to earth movements. The Himalayas, and the Siwaliks in front of them, continue to rise and are, at the same time, notorious for violent storms and heavy rainfall. Earthquakes have produced landslides, and extremely severe floods in the spring and monsoon seasons were the result of rivers being blocked by debris swept down from the hills and forming lake reservoirs which ultimately burst. At present, the existence of five million people is threatened by precisely such a situation in the Moergab river in the Pamir mountains. Natural disasters of perhaps comparable magnitude have been recorded, and one terrible flood, connected with disturbances in the mountains in the north, is known to have devastated the

³¹ Dobby, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50, 55-56, 383.

³² Strabo, *Geography* (Cambridge, Mass. 1949), 15.1.19; Raverty, *Mihran*, p. 324; Arden Wood, 'Rivers and man', p. 2. A nineteenth-century author, Charles Masson, writes about earthquakes in the Kabul area: 'I had become somewhat accustomed to these phenomena, yet not altogether reconciled to them. It is esteemed correct and deferential to the will of heaven to sit tranquil during their occurrence.' (*Narrative of Various Journeys*, III, p. 8)

Panjab in the early fourteenth century, changing abruptly its entire hydrographic network.³³ Most earthquakes produced a shock which, as Charles Masson observed, 'is so transient that it has passed as soon as felt';³⁴ but others have made it into the historical record for having turned entire regions into desert, disrupting rivers, destroying towns and villages, and burying thousands of people under the rubble of collapsing buildings.³⁵ The once populous and famous city of Ghazna started to sink into insignificance after having been badly damaged during a sudden river flood in 1031 AD, which swept away its bridge and bazaars, and which was probably caused by earth movements and accompanying landslides.³⁶ According to Ibn Battuta, the major part of Ghazna was again devastated around the mid-fourteenth century.³⁷ Kabul, too, had declined to village status—for reasons that are not clear, but may be related to the above.³⁸ The 'Greek' city of Begram, about forty kilometres from Kabul, according to local tradition was overwhelmed by some natural catastrophe at some unknown date in medieval times and had ceased to exist at the time of Timur's expedition.³⁹ In other areas, climatic changes probably contributed to changes in the river courses or the extinction of rivers. The Thar desert shows traces of a hydrographic network that was only recently covered by sand, indicating that the region was formerly less arid. Climatic changes, contributing to shifts in the courses of many rivers, are also in evidence in the Multan area. Here we continue to read about the 'rainy season' up to Timur's invasion; but there is no rainy season so far westward at present.⁴⁰

The instability of rivers, and the resulting changes in plains, coastlines and deltas, could not fail to have the most profound consequences for human settlement and economic activity, the more so

³³ Arden Wood, 'Rivers and man', p. 15.

³⁴ Masson, *Narrative of Various Journeys*, III, p. 8.

³⁵ Thus, for instance, the earthquakes in Agra of 1505 (*TF*, p. 183), and in the Kashmir valley of 1555 (*TA*, p. 728) and of 1470 (S. L. Sadhu (ed.), *Medieval Kashmir: Being a reprint of the Rajataranginis of Jonaraja, Shrivara and Shuka, as translated into English by J. C. Dutt and published in 1898 A.D. under the title "Kings of Kashmir"*, Vol. III (New Delhi, 1993), p. 161).

³⁶ H. R. Raverty, *Ghaznin and its environs: geographical, ethnographical and historical* (Or. 1888; Lahore, 1995), pp. 67–70.

³⁷ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 88.

³⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 99: 'it used to be an important city but is not more than a village [now] ...'

³⁹ Masson, *Narrative of Various Journeys*, III, pp. 148–63.

⁴⁰ Raverty, *Mihran*, p. 271.

since such environmental change was always inevitable. Only in some places, like in Varanasi or Nasik, could measures be taken against the erosion of river banks, for instance by building protective ghats—typically on the concave banks of rivers.⁴¹ Navigation had to adapt itself continuously,⁴² as did irrigation.⁴³ Because river shifts could lead to desiccation, we find that sometimes canals were dug to improve or maintain existing irrigation systems, or to create new ones. Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq undertook the construction of canals when some of the tributaries of the Hakra river were drying up, around 1355.⁴⁴ In Java, from times immemorial, *sawah* irrigation made cultivators independent of river fluctuations and allowed them to control, to some extent, the deposition of silt and manure.⁴⁵ But archaeological evidence shows numerous remnants of abandoned cities and towns, including forts, and villages, wherever rivers changed their courses. There is virtually no district on the alluvial plains that does not have mounds which mark places of historical importance. Every deserted river bed meant the disruption of human settlement on some scale. And, inevitably too, India became a graveyard of cities.

Larger changes, particularly if they were abrupt, could bring disaster to a great city, or the removal of its water supply, or the loss of strategic or commercial advantages.⁴⁶ Former capital cities and major commercial centres such as Cambay, Kanauj, Ayudhya, Debal, Mansura, Cranganore, Kayal, and Gaur are among the most famous casualties on this list.⁴⁷ A river might also cause the abandonment of a town or city without actually destroying it. A common phenomenon in the floodplains and deltas of the Indian Ocean was that of deserted river branches becoming stagnant and choked with vegetation, and hence infested with malaria, leading to their final abandonment. In the thirteenth century, the beginnings of the declines

⁴¹ Mate, *Water Management*, p. 77.

⁴² Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, p. 14.

⁴³ Mate, *Water Management*, p. 77; Raverty, *Mihran*, p. 123.

⁴⁴ Cf. Raverty, *Mihran*, p. 123.

⁴⁵ W. A. van der Meulen, 'Irrigation in the Netherlands Indies', *Bulletin of the Colonial Institute*, III, 3–4 (1940), pp. 142–59.

⁴⁶ Arden Wood, 'Rivers and man', p. 3.

⁴⁷ *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 181, 183–5; Raverty, *Mihran*, pp. 9, 165; Duarte Barbosa, II, pp. 88–89, note 3, 122, 140, note 1, 171–2 & passim; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, p. 271, note 1; H. Yule and H. Cordier (eds), *The Travels of Marco Polo*, 2 Volumes (New York, 1992), II, pp. 371–4; V. Ball and W. Crooke (eds and transl.), *Travels in India by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1676)*, 2 Volumes (New Delhi, 1977), I, p. 56.

of Angkor, the great Khmer capital of Cambodia, of Shrivijaya, the capital of Indonesia's first maritime empire, and of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, the northern Buddhist capitals of Sri Lanka, were all associated with problems of water management in the wake of military invasion, deforestation, climatic shifts, and the spread of malaria in expanding riverine swamps or stagnant backwaters.⁴⁸ In the Ganges delta, the number of cities, and even capitals, buried in the marshes, is simply uncountable. And in Sind, according to Richard Burton,

'Deserts spring up, cities, ports and towns fall in the space of time which it takes the Indus to shift its bed for a few miles, or a native prince to remove his capital. Except in a few cases, it is vain to speculate on the topography of the country fifty years ago.'⁴⁹

An example is Thatta, Burton's 'Tattah':

'Under the Moslem dynasties, it was the capital of the Delta, and the most considerable place in Sindh. At one time the Indus washed its walls, bringing to its gates the wealth and traffic which Kurrachee now monopolizes; at present the stream is about three miles distant. Its population, anciently estimated at 280,000, probably does not amount to 7,000 souls; and some migrate every year to towns and districts which suffer less from malaria fever. The town is a squalid mass of ruins, with here and there a lofty brick house or a glittering minaret, the vestiges of old prosperity . . .'⁵⁰

Due to the obstruction of the Indus river, Multan too lost a considerable amount of its river traffic, and many artisans and merchants are reported to have left Multan for this reason.⁵¹ Lahore was similarly

⁴⁸ *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 164-5, 287, 374.

⁴⁹ R. F. Burton, *Sindh and the Races that inhabit the Valley of the Indus (1851)* (Karachi, 1973), pp. 3-4. The truth of Burton's statements is born out in countless Indo-Persian letters and chronicles; see, for instance *IM*, pp. 110-2 (letter no. 52) and pp. 49-51 (letter no. 21) on the threat of floods in the rivers Ravi and Chenab to the two forts of Multan, and changes in the course of a river channel threatening Uchh, both in the fourteenth century; Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, I, pp. 256-7, 271, describing the decline of the city of Muhammad Tur due to changing river courses and how the want of water ruined the lands of the Sumras, below Bhakkar.

⁵⁰ Burton, *Sindh*, pp. 5-6. Tavernier, in the seventeenth century, wrote: 'The commerce of Tatta, which was formerly considerable, decreasing rapidly, because the entrance to the river becomes worse from day to day, and the sands, which have accumulated, almost close the passage' (Ball and Crooke, *op. cit.*, p. 10).

⁵¹ Ball and Crooke, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74; S. Sen (ed.), *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri* (New Delhi, 1949), p. 77. In the early fifteenth century the drying up of the Ravi had also caused considerable desolation (*TMS*, p. 219).

affected. The Mughal emperor Jahangir (1605–28) still frequently visited the city, but after his reign Lahore lost its status as the premier trading city in the long-distance trade between the eastern Mediterranean and India.⁵² The silting up of the Indus around Thatta was one reason for the decline of this ‘very lofty’ city, but the Ravi river, on the banks of which Lahore was built, also changed its course, causing much damage through flooding and making commercial access more difficult; extremely heavy rainfall further contributed to the decline.⁵³

The devastating power of excessive rain is abundantly illustrated in the medieval Indian sources. A fifteenth-century Sanskrit chronicle of Kashmir, Shrivara’s *Jainarājataranginī*, describes how in 1476 AD flood bubbles, the harbingers of incessant rain, appeared on the water

‘and the clouds which raised the bubbles threatened to destroy all that would grow: . . . The Vitasta, the Ledari, the Sindhu, the Kshipitaka and other rivers, seemed to vie with one another, and drowned the villages on their banks in their fury. . . . The waters then became ungovernable and caused mischief. . . . They swept away beasts and kine and living beings, as well as houses, grain and other things, and became terrible as a host of the mlecchas. . . . The Vitasta, far away from her lord the ocean . . . turned in her course, and flowed in an opposite direction. Landmarks were submerged, roads were destroyed, and the land was full of water and polluted with mud . . .’⁵⁴

Similarly, in Kashmir in 1360 AD, excessive and prolonged rainfall alone appears to have caused ‘a cruel inundation’:

‘What the sun is to the kamuda flower, or a hero to his enemies, so was the inundation to the city and the trees. The city was under water, but the mighty inundation still increased and reached the hills which shed tears in the shape of waterfalls. There was not a tree, not a boundary mark, not a bridge, not a house, that stood in the way of the inundation, which it did not destroy . . .’⁵⁵

Prone to environmental disruption, forever sustained but also threatened by water, Indian Ocean civilizations, thus, provided fertile

⁵² Cf. Chaudhuri, ‘Reflections’, pp. 87–88.

⁵³ F. Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656–1668* (Sec. revised edition by V. A. Smith, Delhi, 1989), pp. 382–4; Ball and Crooke, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

⁵⁴ Sadhu, *Medieval Kashmir*, pp. 106–7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43.

ground for the romantic imagination. People with a romantic interest in ruins have, for example, long preferred to believe that almost nothing was known about the Khmer monuments. In *Pèlerin d'Angkor*, Pierre Loti wrote:

'Here there once were palaces, in which lived those prodigiously luxurious kings, of whom we know nothing, who have passed into oblivion without leaving so much as a name engraved either in stone or in memory.'⁵⁶

The Khmer, according to the French writer, having suddenly appeared from abroad and settled on the banks of the Mekong, disappeared as mysteriously.

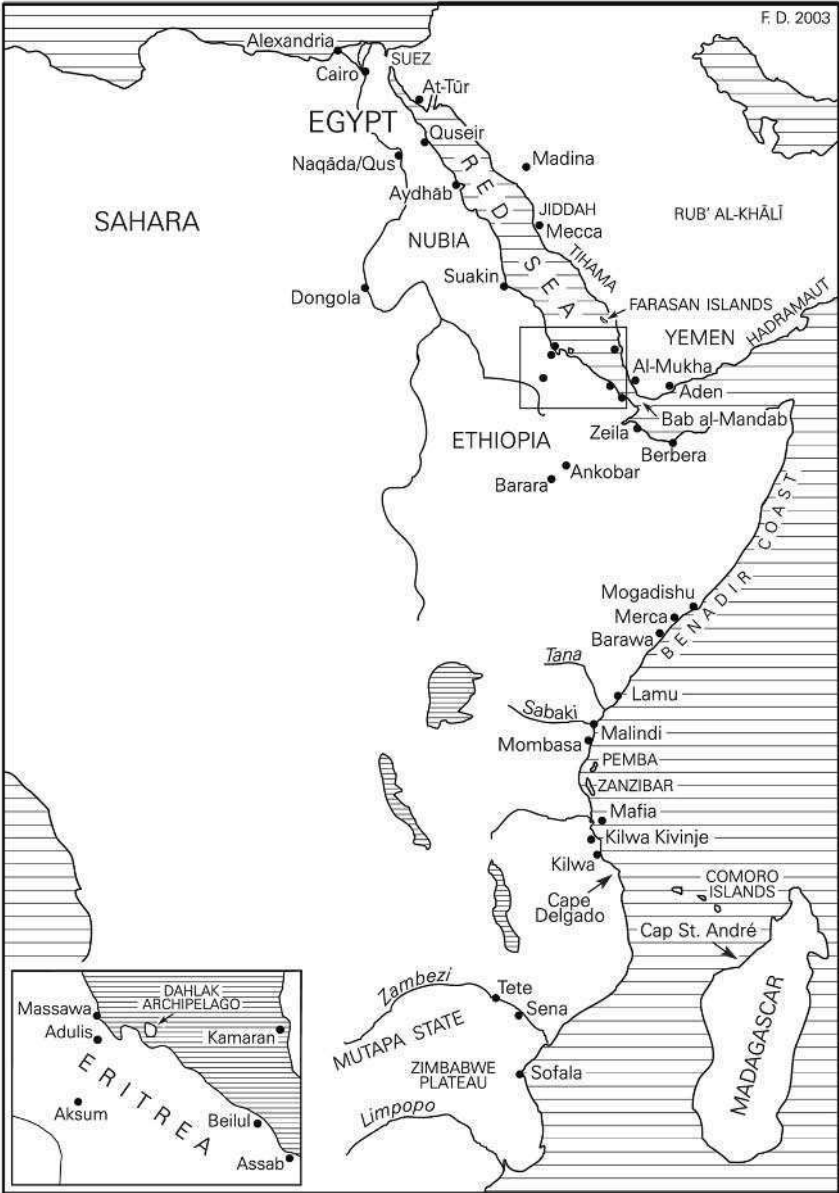
THE HISTORICAL UNITY OF THE INDIAN OCEAN: COASTLINES AND THE CONNECTIONS OF LAND AND SEA

If pervasive environmental change is in evidence back to the furthest reaches of the archaeological record, there are also remarkably stable patterns in the general geography of the Indian Ocean. In particular, the connections of land and sea, and the degree of importance and accessibility of the hinterlands, although extremely variable in the different geographic subregions, have changed little over time. Here again, rivers and other geographical features were essential. They set the conditions for the unification of the Indian Ocean world in medieval times. This unification was hardly complete, and is perhaps better characterized as a form of regional interrelatedness, one which was often tenuous, and open-ended. Its importance will be demonstrated below by following the ocean's coastline from west to east.

Africa has always been hard to penetrate from the Indian Ocean due to the general lack of navigable rivers on the eastcoast. *Swahili* (Ar. 'coastal') culture was sea-borne and did not spread far into the interior, contributing to the perception that the coast was separated from the interior.⁵⁷ In the late sixteenth century the Portuguese still

⁵⁶ Quoted in G. Coedès, *Angkor* (Singapore, 1986), p. 10.

⁵⁷ See D. Nurse and T. Spear, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800–1500* (Philadelphia, 1985); T. Spear, 'Early Swahili History Reconsidered', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33, 2 (2000), pp. 257–290.



Map 1. East Africa

had very little idea about the geography of the African interior.⁵⁸ Even so, connections existed. Agricultural colonization had proceeded from the coast inwards. The growth of dense populations in the moist and warm regions of the coast, in the Zambezi valley, the lakes area, and in the perennially watered valleys around the great mountains, had been made possible by the introduction of food plants like banana, rice, coconut, the coco-yam, and the Asian yam by Indonesia's 'people of the sea' in the early centuries AD.⁵⁹ There was, in fact, a considerable difference between the southern and northern Swahili coasts in terms of the access they provided to the interior of Africa.⁶⁰ The southern rivers, like the Zambezi and Limpopo (among other, smaller ones), were navigable for hundreds of kilometres inland, even though their entrances were hazardous, with the main channels shifting as a result of obstruction by mud banks in the upper reaches.⁶¹ Conditions on the great Zimbabwe plateau, where much gold was produced, were healthier than in the northern wilderness, allowing for the rise of large internal political formations, like the Mutapa state, with which the ports interacted.⁶² Swahili Muslims sometimes did penetrate the south, and they made converts far up the Zambezi valley and onto the Zimbabwe plateau.⁶³ Gold, ivory and slaves were brought to the Zambezi river ports of Sena and Tete (respectively 260 and 515 kilometres from the sea, with a portage in between them at Lupata Gorge) by Shona speakers, or to inland bazaars at Tete, and there exchanged for goods brought

⁵⁸ Maps of the period still reflect the generally accepted idea of the time that all the great rivers of Africa flowed from one central lake (*Duarte Barbosa, I*, p. 13, note 2).

⁵⁹ R. K. Kent, 'The Possibilities of Indonesian Colonies in Africa with Special Reference to Madagascar', *Mouvements de Populations dans l'Océan Indien* (Paris, 1979), pp. 93–105; R. A. Oliver and J. D. Fage, *A Short History of Africa* (New York, 1988), p. 80; R. Blench, 'The Ethnographic Evidence for Long-Distance Contacts Between Oceania and East Africa', in: J. Reade (ed.), *The Indian Ocean in Antiquity* (London, 1996), pp. 417–38; R. Oliver, 'The Problem of Bantu Expansion', in: J. D. Fage and R. A. Oliver (eds), *Papers in African Prehistory* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 141–56.

⁶⁰ M. N. Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: the Swahili Coast, India and Portugal in the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore and London, 1998), esp. pp. 20, 68–69, 83–85, 93–94.

⁶¹ *Duarte Barbosa, I*, p. 14, note 1.

⁶² Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders*, pp. 69, 85. Barbosa writes that the Zambezi [Cuama] 'is a very great river . . . which leads into the inner country over against the kingdom of Benametapa more than a hundred and seventy leagues [about 850 kilometres]' (*Duarte Barbosa, I*, pp. 13–14).

⁶³ Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

by Muslim (and later Portuguese) traders.⁶⁴ Vasco da Gama bestowed upon the Zambezi delta the name 'Rio dos bons Signaes' because of the presence here of men of civilized appearance, whereas Barbosa refers to it as the site of 'a very great town of Moors,' which he calls Angoya.⁶⁵ Somewhat to the north there was another port city, Braboa, located inland on a river, which was visited by Gujarati ships and had extensive contacts with the interior and with the Mutapa state.⁶⁶ Sofala, the most southern city in 'the land of the Zanj,' was a famous entrepôt for the gold and ivory trade, located on a bay, and with a wide hinterland of mines and alluvial gold washings, to which, however, it was connected by numerous overland routes rather than its river 'of no great size.'⁶⁷ Generally, the key elements in the human geography of the Swahili coast have not been rivers, but rather the many bays, inlets, and sounds protected by coral reef (behind which there were sheltered sandy beaches on which even large ships could be beached at high tide), as well as islands and projecting headlands.⁶⁸ Coastal lowlands, and shallow arms of river deltas which had previously silted up, were often drowned by the sea, forming shallow straits between islands and between islands and mainland.⁶⁹ It is these features that facilitated coastal traffic and gave rise to settlements and settlement clusters, and they intensified the maritime orientation of the coast. Most importantly, the city-state of Kilwa, with domains embracing settlements on the Tanzanian coast up to Kilwa Kivinje and possibly the Rufiji, the island of Mafia, and Sofala, owed its fifteenth-century prosperity to the control of the gold exports from Sofala, not the export of products from its own interior.⁷⁰ The huge, mosquito-infected delta of the Rufiji, to the north of Kilwa, like the swamps of the Lamu archipelago from the Tana river up to Somalia, produced mangrove poles which were

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 54, 94.

⁶⁵ Duarte Barbosa, I, p. 13, note 2, and pp. 14–15.

⁶⁶ Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders*, p. 40.

⁶⁷ Duarte Barbosa, I, pp. 5–8, note 3; Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁶⁸ See A. H. J. Prins, *Sailing from Lamu: A Study of Maritime Culture in East Africa* (Assen, 1965), pp. 17–18; Pearson, *op. cit.*, pp. 41, 54.

⁶⁹ Thus, for instance, the Lamu delta was transformed into an archipelago when the river channels dwindled to mere trickles (Prins, *Sailing from Lamu*, p. 18).

⁷⁰ J. Kirkman, 'The history of the coast of East Africa up to 1700', in: N. Posnansky (ed.), *Prelude to East African History* (London, 1966), p. 117; Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

much in demand in Arabia and the Persian Gulf.⁷¹ The more northern Swahili towns, like Kilwa, characteristically spawned satellite settlements along the coasts with their clusters of islands rather than inland. Mombasa was a rising town on the coast, whose Shaykh was reported to have been an offshoot of the royal house of Kilwa and pursued an aggressive policy towards Malindi, essentially two groups of towns on the Tana and Sabaki estuaries, somewhat further to the north.⁷² Pate, the political capital of the Lamu archipelago, subjected the entire coast from Mogadishu to Cape Delgado in the fourteenth century.⁷³

Land-locked Ethiopia has, throughout history, been crucially dependent on the northern *Mareb Mellash* or Eritrea for access to the sea.⁷⁴ Overseas interests and the tendency to look towards the contemporary culture of the Hellenized eastern Mediterranean already shaped some of the institutions of the Aksumite state (c. first–early seventh century), turning it into a ‘Black Byzantium.’ Ethiopia became Constantinople’s trading partner in the Indian Ocean, and was often confused in the sources with India itself.⁷⁵ Even nowadays access to the sea is an issue over which Ethiopia and Eritrea go to war, and the autobiography of the late emperor Haile Selassie contains a great deal of material relating to this recurrent problem. Over the long term, Ethiopia’s history is suspended between a tendency to retreat into its mountain fastnesses, on the one hand, and a need for contact with the outside world through access to the Eritrean sea, on the other. In the first century AD, the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* presented the first detailed account of the winds, shoals, and landing procedures at Adulis, the fabled port, halfway down the Gulf of Zula in the

⁷¹ E. B. Martin and Ch. P. Martin, *Cargoes of the East: The Ports, Trade and Culture of the Arabian Seas and Western Indian Ocean* (London, 1978), pp. 1, 6, 64, 70, 74–75, 103, 108–9.

⁷² Kirkman, ‘History of the coast of East Africa’, pp. 116–7.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁷⁴ F. A. Dombrowski, *Ethiopia’s Access to the Sea* (Leiden, 1985); R. Pankhurst, *An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia from Early Times to 1800* (London, 1961); R. Pankhurst, ‘The history of Ethiopia’s relations with India prior to the nineteenth century’, in: *IV Congresso Internazionale di Studi Etiopici*, 1 (1974), pp. 205–311; S. C. H. Munro-Hay, ‘The foreign trade of the Aksumite port of Adulis’, *Azania*, 17 (1982), pp. 107–25; S. C. H. Munro-Hay, ‘Aksumite Overseas Interests’, in: J. Reade (ed.), *The Indian Ocean in Antiquity* (London, 1996), pp. 403–16.

⁷⁵ Munro-Hay, ‘Aksumite Overseas Interests’, p. 403; for the medieval identification of Ethiopia and India, see *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 47 ff.

Red Sea, which was buried under sand brought down by the Haddas river in the eighth century.⁷⁶ In 522 AD, Kosmas Indikopleustes (the 'Indian navigator') described the caravan route from Adulis to the capital of Aksum through Qohaito and Matara, cities which are now, like Adulis itself, archaeological sites, with remains of storehouses and palaces still visible. The 1,151 kilometres of Eritrean coast provided numerous safe anchorages which made an important nexus of commerce for millennia for Egyptians, Sabaeans, Aksumites, Indians, and Persians, who obtained here quantities of gum, gold, honey, wax, and myrrh. By the fifteenth century, the ports of Zeila and Berbera were the most important outlets of Ethiopian trade in the Red Sea.⁷⁷ Ankobar, with Aliu Amba, was at the end of a trade route leading to Zeila, at the very edge of the Ethiopian plateau and nearly 3,000 metres above sea level. About 46 kilometres to the east was the great mercantile centre of Gendevelu, where the bales of Indian spices were taken off the camels—which could not climb to the heights. Mogadishu and Merca were closely allied with the Somali tribe of the Ajuran, with whom they exploited the rich valley of the Webbe Shebeli river and through it a profitable route which extended into the highlands of Ethiopia. To the south of Mogadishu, the oligarchic state of Barawa depended on similar conditions. The benadir coast declined, however, in the fifteenth century, due to the intervention of the Amhara kings of Ethiopia who diverted much of the trade to the alternative Red Sea route.⁷⁸

Further to the north and east on this route along the Indian Ocean's shoreline, the quadrilateral landmass of the *Ĵazīrat al-ʿArab* or 'Island of the Arabs'—by which term was meant the Arabian peninsula—was mostly inhabited by scattered nomadic populations who used camels and also horses.⁷⁹ In some parts of the *Rubʿ al-Khālī* or 'Empty Quarter' no rain may fall for ten years on end. The southern part of the peninsula, comprising the Yemen and parts of the Hadramaut, was however deeply affected by the monsoon, and in this sense can be said to belong to the world of the Indian Ocean. The Yemen, and Hadramaut and Oman, have denser, agricultural populations and contain numerous cities, as do a few other places in the Hijaz

⁷⁶ L. Casson (ed. and transl.), *The Periplus Maris Erythraei* (Princeton, 1989).

⁷⁷ O. G. S. Crawford (ed.), *Ethiopian Itineraries, circa 1400–1524* (Cambridge, 1958).

⁷⁸ Kirkman, 'History of the coast of East Africa', p. 116.

⁷⁹ *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Volume I* (Leiden, 1986), pp. 533–47, s.v. *Djazīrat al-ʿArab*.

and the coastal plain of Tihama. But generally the coasts of the Arabian peninsula have no major indentions anywhere, and no large perennial rivers. The paucity of shelters for ships here is unparalleled in the Indian Ocean. The one good natural harbour along the southern coast is Aden.

The only serious alternative to the Red Sea, therefore, was the spice route which ran through the Persian Gulf and then followed the great rivers of Mesopotamia, to split at Mosul, either in the direction of Aleppo to reach the Mediterranean, or going northward to Trebizond on the Black Sea. Important caravan routes at one time also branched off towards Palmyra, one of the greatest commercial sites of late antiquity, deriving most of its wealth from the India trade. The rivers of Mesopotamia, too, despite their tendency to change their beds, provided the homeland of some of the earliest, if not the earliest, literate civilizations in the world.⁸⁰ Along the Indian Ocean routes they maintained early links with the Indus Valley civilization, which was also urban and literate, as well as similarly founded on river irrigation, already more than fifteen hundred kilometres inland. For medieval times, the information presented on the Tigris and the Euphrates, and their plains, by such authors as Marco Polo, Marignolli and Conti, or even Pires and Barbosa, is remarkably deficient and still partly legendary, harking back to the idea that the Euphrates was one of the rivers that sprang from the earthly paradise.⁸¹ The early Italian and Iberian accounts produce the impression that the Euphrates was better navigable with light boats than the Tigris, which was narrower and had a swifter flow.⁸² In truth, both rivers had their navigational difficulties, due to shoals and uneven seasonal waterflows. But most places in Mesopotamia could be reached through a network of rivers and canals.⁸³ Navigation was easiest in the lower reaches of the two combined rivers, the area known as the *Shatt al-Arab*, even though the position of waterways, lakes and marshes was in a constant flux here.⁸⁴ Between Mesopotamia

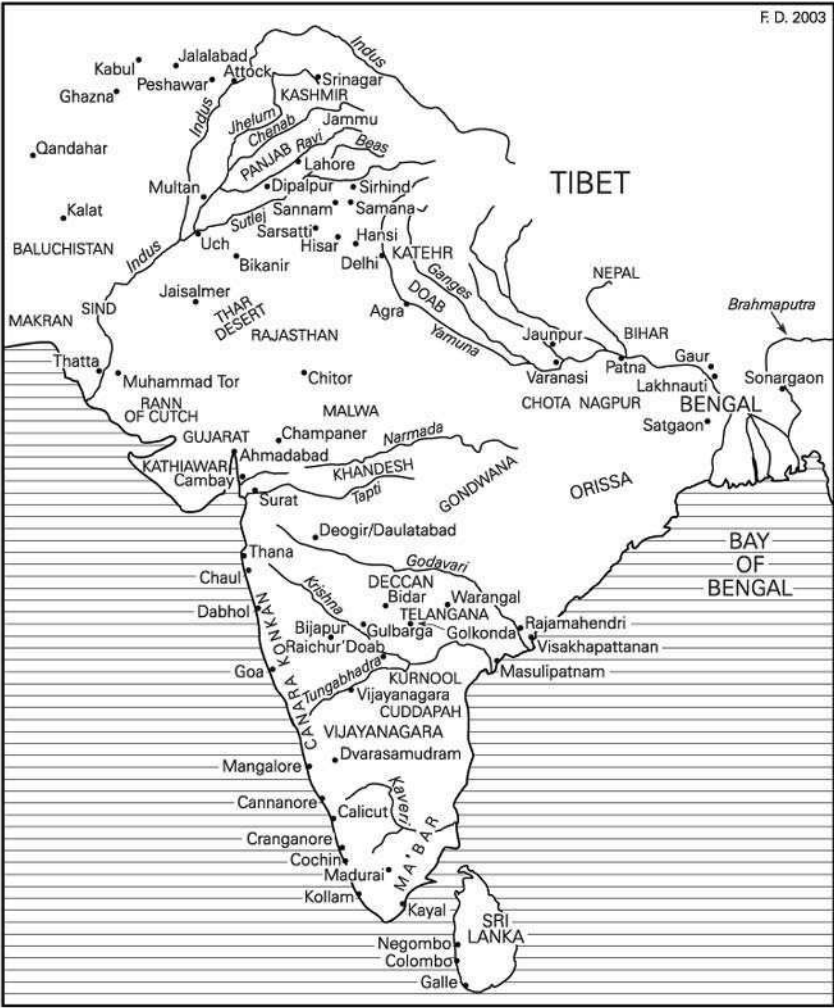
⁸⁰ In the region near Nippur, meanders of an old river course of about the same size as the modern Euphrates can still be seen (M. Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Ancient Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East* (Oxford, 1990).

⁸¹ R. H. Major (ed.), *India in the Fifteenth Century* (Delhi, 1974), II, p. 5; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 30; Duarte Barbosa, I, p. 88, and note 1.

⁸² Major, *India*, II, p. 5; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 30; Duarte Barbosa, I, p. 88.

⁸³ Roaf, *Cultural Atlas*, p. 122.

⁸⁴ Cf. pp. 10–11.



Map 2. South Asia

and the Indus plains, the huge Persian plateau lacked great rivers. Pires mentions but one river in this area, which appears to correspond to the *Rio dos Nautiques*, the present Dasht river, and which played an important role in the irrigation of Baluchi ('Nodakhi') villages on the Makran coast, 'because it waters the whole plain.'⁸⁵ Throughout much of the Persian plateau, agriculture was dependent on a system of underground water channels, known as *qanāts*, and remained precarious, while traffic depended on caravan routes rather than waterways.

The Indus itself is a great trans-Himalayan river, and, with 2,900 kilometres, one of the longest in the world, navigable in one way or another up to the foothills.⁸⁶ In the plains, the river and its tributaries could, at least seasonally, reach such formidable dimensions that it would seem the natural 'boundary of Hind and Sind' to an invader from the west.⁸⁷ It has an annual flow which is twice that of the Nile and three times that of the Tigris and Euphrates combined. Henry Pottinger, approaching the low and flat coast of Sind from the southwest, writes of the

'extraordinary, and to a person unacquainted with the cause, alarming appearance which the sea presented, owing to the great body of water that is disemboved by the River Indus, causing a very confused rippling, which, added to the discoloured sea, impresses an idea of a bank with a few inches of water upon it; though, on sounding, we found there were several fathoms.'⁸⁸

In some parts of lower Sind, near Thatta, as a fourteenth-century historian observes, 'from the great breadth of the stream, the land on the opposite side was not discernible.'⁸⁹ The fordable spots were far to the north, near Attock, where the river was interspersed with many islands that could be defended, and near Multan, 460 kilometres down from Attock. Timur, however, commemorates that, in

⁸⁵ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 31.

⁸⁶ See O. H. K. Spate and A. T. A. Learmonth, *India and Pakistan: A General and Regional Geography* (London, 1967), passim; D. Ross, *The Land of the Five Rivers and Sindh* (London, 1883); H. T. Lambrick, *Sind: A General Introduction* (Hyderabad, 1964); J. Fairley, *The Lion River: The Indus* (New York, 1975); Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, pp. 15–18.

⁸⁷ *Al-Hind*, I, p. 132; Raverty, *Mihran*, p. 10, note 3; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 93; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 38.

⁸⁸ H. Pottinger, *Travels in Beloochistan and Sind; accompanied by a geographical and historical account of those countries, with a map* (London, 1816), pp. 8–9.

⁸⁹ *TFSA*, p. 235.

1398 AD, he succeeded in constructing boat-bridges across the Indus and Chenab at other sites, also far to the north, where his Mongol predecessors Chingiz Khan and Tarmashirin Khan, had failed or were turned back; while elsewhere he and his army appear to have crossed some of the smaller rivers simply by boats and by swimming.⁹⁰

The Indus drainage basin includes the region of the Panjab or 'five-river' land, where it is joined by the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Sutlej, and Beas; but it also passes for hundreds of kilometres through the rainless country of Sind without tributaries, steadily losing water in a Nilotic landscape. The soils of both the upper and lower basins of the Indus, corresponding to the Panjab and Sind respectively, consist largely of rich alluvial deposits brought down by the rivers. Where they are annually flooded they produce two, in some places three, crops per year (grains, pulses, oilseeds, dye-plants, drugs, fruits, cotton, sugar).⁹¹ In Sind, beyond the 'spils' of the river, the soil changes into a barren drifting sand and becomes impregnated with saltpetre and salt by evaporation.⁹² If, in Sind, sometimes for two or even three years together no rain falls, at other times up to ninety cm may fall within forty-eight hours, resulting in torrents of water sweeping away bridges and embankments.⁹³ Highly unstable in their courses, the Indus or 'Mihraṇ' and all the Panjab rivers caused constant mutations in the hydrographic map and the patterns of cultivation and settlement, and, not surprisingly, a great part of the delta south of Thatta has been formed relatively recently, after the mid-fourteenth century.⁹⁴ Richard Burton wrote about Sind:

⁹⁰ Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, III, pp. 408, 412, 420; *JN*, II, pp. 41–42.

⁹¹ Ross, *Land of the Five Rivers and Sindh*, p. 2.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Raverty, *Mihraṇ*, pp. 9, 171, 126; Wadia, *Geology of India*, pp. 389–90; M. B. Pithawalla, 'Identification and Description of some Old Sites in Sind', *The Journal of the Sind Historical Society*, III, 4 (1938); M. A. Stein, *An Archaeological Tour along the Ghaggar-Hakra River* (Meerut, 1989); A. Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India* (Calcutta, 1924); A. H. Dani, 'Sindhu-Sauvira', in: H. Khuhro (ed.), *Sindh through the Centuries* (Karachi, 1981), pp. 35–42; S. Q. Fatimi, 'The Twin Ports of Daybul', in: *ibid.*, pp. 97–105; M. R. Haig, *The Indus Delta Country* (London, 1894); J. M. Murdo, 'An Account of the Country of Sindh', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1 (1834), pp. 223–57; C. F. Oldham, 'Notes on the Lost River of the Indian Desert', *Calcutta Review*, 59 (1874), pp. 1–27; R. D. Oldham, 'On Probable Changes in the Geography of the Panjab and its Rivers: A Historical-Geographical Survey', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, LV, 2 (1886), pp. 322–43; Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, pp. 11–12; A. G. O'Brien, *The Ancient Chronology of Thar: The Bhāttika, Laukika and Sindh Eras* (Delhi, 1996), pp. 39, 43, 58.

'The province is a sloping surface of silt and sand, through which the Indus cuts its varying way with a facility that passes description. The erection of even a few feet of brickwork built up in the bed of the Indus as it still flows, might divert the stream into another channel, cause the decline and downfall of a metropolis and twenty towns, convert a garden into a silt desert, and transfer plenty a population to what a month before was a glaring waste. As regards the ancient course of the Lower Indus infinite has been the speculation, the theorization, the dissertation, the argument, and the contradiction upon this much vexed subject.'⁹⁵

In Upper and Middle Sind, wrote Major Raverty, in a book especially devoted to the subject, 'there is scarcely any part of this vast alluvial tract, over which in the course of ages, the Ab-i-Sind or Indus has not flowed at some time or other.'⁹⁶ The most pronounced environmental phenomenon throughout its recorded history has been the westering of the Indus and all of the Panjab tributaries.⁹⁷ The shifting of the Indus system and the drying up of the Hakra or Wahinda river (probably the Saraswati of ancient times) already had far-reaching effects on the development of the cities of Mohenjodaro and Harappa.⁹⁸ The effects of later shifts and floodings on such cities as Thatta, Multan, Lahore, or Muhammad Tor, while varied, were often no less disastrous.⁹⁹ The Sutlej, whose Sanskrit name 'Shatadru' means 'hundred-mouthed,' is the most erratic of the Panjab rivers and is notorious for leaving the country behind as it shifts its bed, overlaid with sand.¹⁰⁰ The Beas, too, especially below Lahore, has always been remarkable for its erratic course, which is so irregular that it has been impossible to tell where its channel would be from one year to another.¹⁰¹ In the Panjab, lines of mounds marking abandoned villages along former riverbeds are so common that they have a special name, *thehs*.¹⁰² Inland navigation has adjusted and was never interrupted. The Indus, after leaving the mountains, allows only raft

⁹⁵ Quoted in Raverty, *Mihran*, pp. 339–341.

⁹⁶ Raverty, *Mihran*, p. 163.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*; Oldham, 'On Probable Changes.'

⁹⁸ Wadia, *Geology of India*, p. 390; Misra, 'Human Adaptations to the Changing Landscape of the Indian Arid Zone.'

⁹⁹ Cf. pp. 15–16.

¹⁰⁰ Raverty, *Mihran*, p. 357.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹⁰² Arden Wood, 'Rivers and man', p. 3.

navigation up to Attock.¹⁰³ In its middle and lower courses, in spite of the irregularity and variation in its bedding, there was throughout the year enough deep water to allow the movement of ships of all sorts.¹⁰⁴ Here river traffic was intense and supplanted that of caravan routes, or complemented them, as in so many amphibious military campaigns.¹⁰⁵ The Panjab rivers, too, were large, and capable of carrying big ships up to the foothills of the Himalayas during floods. Below the foothills, a profusion of small boats accommodated itself to low levels of water during the rest of the year.¹⁰⁶ The upshot is that through this vast system of shifting waterways and feeder streams, the whole of north-western India was linked to the western Indian Ocean. We have evidence showing that Firuz Shah Tughluq, in the fourteenth century, was drafting plans for the excavation of navigable canals between the Sutlej and the Yamuna, a tributary of the Ganges; had these been executed, there would have been uninterrupted inland navigation from the frontiers of China to those of Persia.¹⁰⁷

The Panjab remained connected to the Doab or 'two-river' land of the Ganges and the Yamuna by land routes, but the land routes are short by comparison with the river routes. Physiographically, the Gangetic plain resembles the Lombardy plain and Mesopotamia, but it dwarfs them.¹⁰⁸ On a rough estimate, the Ganges and its tributaries nowadays affect the lives of more than five hundred million people. Between its source in the Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal it has a length of more than 2,400 kilometres and flows through one of the most fertile areas of the world, draining about a quarter of the South Asian subcontinent. The Gangetic plain has been the heartland of successive Indian civilizations, from the period of the early Buddhist kingdoms in the centuries BC to that of the imperial Mughals in the early modern era. There is an ancient bas-relief of the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna at Prayāga (modern Allahabad), dating back to about 400 AD, which appears to be a

¹⁰³ Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, pp. 14–15, 17.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁵ See, for instance, *TFSI*, pp. 198–9.

¹⁰⁶ Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, p. 18.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, p. 6, note 2; Raverty, *Mihran*, pp. 121–3.

¹⁰⁸ E. H. G. Dobby, *Monsoon Asia* (London, 1967), p. 230.

symbolic representation of *Madhyadesha*, the Middle Country, and shows clearly the importance of these rivers in the political geography of what was then the core region of the Gupta empire.¹⁰⁹ Even though Prayāga, the capital of this empire, was far from the sea, an extensive body of water below the confluence of the two rivers is shown as if it were an ocean (*samudra*), rather than a continuing stream, and in the words of one analyst, 'the merging [of] streams into a single mighty river, or great rivers into an enormous ocean' signified the emperor's drawing together under a unified central authority the disparate states of India.¹¹⁰

The history of settlement and agricultural expansion in these immense river plains has yet to be written. Textual evidence on this subject is exceedingly vague. Barbosa, for instance, in the early sixteenth century, wrote that the Ganges river was very great and fair on both banks and well peopled with fair and wealthy Heathen cities.¹¹¹ And Nicolo Conti, in the fifteenth century perhaps the first European to sail upriver, observed that

'on both banks of the stream there are most charming villas and plantations and gardens, wherein grow vast varieties of fruits, and above all those called Musa [banana], which are more sweet than honey, resembling figs, and also the nuts which we call nuts of India.'¹¹²

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Gangetic plains must still have had large areas of forest and jungle, but padi rice was already widely cultivated in the delta and lowlands of the Ganges, whereas outside Bengal sorghum, millets and other tropical cereals were the staple crops.¹¹³

River navigation in the northern Indian plains and the elaborate organization of their waterways have been the subject of detailed legislation from Mauryan to Mughal times.¹¹⁴ The tributaries which join the Ganges from the right, from the forested heights of the peninsula, such as the Kamanāshā, the Phalgu, and the Son, offered little scope for navigation during any time of the year.¹¹⁵ But the

¹⁰⁹ Harley and Woodward, *History of Cartography*, II-1, p. 312, figure 15.9.

¹¹⁰ F. M. Asher, quoted *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Duarte Barbosa, II, p. 134.

¹¹² Major, *India*, II, p. 10.

¹¹³ Cf. Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, pp. 62, 237.

¹¹⁴ Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, p. 12.

¹¹⁵ Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, p. 21.

Yamuna was navigable from Delhi onwards by flat boats, except only in the middle of the dry season, from January to March.¹¹⁶ Most importantly, the Ganges' ability to establish links between the sea and the interior of the subcontinent was enhanced by an entire series of major tributaries on its left, while in its delta it could accommodate a great amount of traffic through a multiplicity of arms.¹¹⁷ The rivers of the left bank, while hardly navigable in their high basins, had sufficient water in the plains throughout the year to be navigable for a diverse range of boats.¹¹⁸ Thus the Rāmgangā, Gomatī, Sāī, Ghāgharā or Sarū, Rāptī, the Small and Great Gandak, the Bāghmatī, the Lakhnandāī, and other rivers on the left side of the Ganges constituted a thicket of waterways which were of prime importance for navigation.¹¹⁹ The Ganges itself, upstream of what is now Allahabad, could be embarked from Hardwar during high waters by small boats, and to the south of Garhmukteshvar (at the level of Delhi) by larger vessels according to the season.¹²⁰ Due, in part, to its many tributaries, from Allahabad onwards, the Ganges became the most important of all river routes, with a very gradual descent and regular flow. Like the lower Indus, the river was so wide that, being in the middle of it, in Conti's words, 'you cannot see land on either side.'¹²¹ From Patna to Bengal, the river was virtually the only means to travel, since here the terrain on both sides of the river discouraged any other traffic.¹²² To the south of this area, the plain is bordered by the mountainous belt of the Chota Nagpur, a heavily wooded massif; to the north, by a labyrinth of riverbeds, alluvial folds and marshlands. Nowhere else in the Ganges basin are the jungles of the central hills so close to the Himalayan Terai. Beyond this corridor, the Brahmaputra, with the Tista, is the most important tributary to the Ganges, with its origins deep in southern and western Tibet. The Brahmaputra constitutes yet another vast allu-

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 21–23.

¹¹⁹ For references to some of these rivers in contemporary sources, see *TFS*, pp. 14, 228, 269, 301; *TFSA*, p. 111; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 355; Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, III, p. 433.

¹²⁰ Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, p. 19.

¹²¹ Major, *India*, II, p. 10.

¹²² J. Deloche, *Transport and Communications in India prior to Steam Locomotion*, Volume I: *Land Transport* (New Delhi, 1993), p. 39.

vial plain, submerged during part of the year by swollen rivers, which leave behind abandoned rills, marshes and silt tracks in the dry season.¹²³ Problems related to communication, drainage, and cultivation of the land have been addressed here by raising extensive embankments in the plains exposed to inundation, which were both roads and dikes.¹²⁴ The Brahmaputra was navigable up to Guwahati for large barges, while the small boats of the Assamese could go much farther. But in the valley of Assam river navigation was much less common than in Bengal, and here again the riverbanks were in many places covered with a thick jungle.

The innumerable river shifts have made it difficult to recover the sites of many cities and towns throughout the Indo-Gangetic plains, particularly in the softer and newer alluvial soils.¹²⁵ Tributaries of the Ganges often displaced themselves during floods, or filled up ancient dry beddings.¹²⁶ Up to c. 1595 AD, for instance, the Sarju river still met the Ghaghara at Ayudhya, having already absorbed the water of the Kauralia.¹²⁷ The cyclical dessication of Haryana seems to have depended on the ability of the Yamuna to feed the Chitang. By the fourteenth century the whole tract was waterless, and did not revive until Firuz Shah Tughluq constructed a canal from the Yamuna to Hansi and Hisar.¹²⁸ The region north of the Delhi-Multan line was once better watered than it is now; Muslim chronicles describe a much more productive region here, and a direct route between Delhi and Multan which passed through many large towns, while a 'rainy season' is mentioned in places where there is now an annual rainfall of between 12 and 25 cm.¹²⁹

Hydrological change is even more in evidence in the Ganges delta, the area now constituting Bangla Desh and a wedge of eastern India, where the Ganges is joined by the Brahmaputra. The vast cascade of water coming down from these two rivers never had a permanent path to the ocean. Rather, its numerous shifting channels have

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Cf. Arden Wood, 'Rivers and man', pp. 1-5.

¹²⁶ Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, p. 12; I. Habib, 'The Geographical Background', in: T. Raychaudhuri and I. Habib (eds), *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Volume I, c. 1200-c. 1750 (Delhi, 1984), p. 4.

¹²⁷ Habib, 'Geographical Background', p. 4.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*; *TF*, p. 146.

¹²⁹ Arden Wood, 'Rivers and man', p. 12.

incessantly created and destroyed islands on which, over the centuries, millions of Bengalis have attempted to live.¹³⁰ Navigation was of paramount significance in the Gangetic plains generally, but in the delta, again, there often were virtually no other routes of communication, and as a result, according to a fourteenth-century Arab account, 'there are two lakh small and large boats always moving in the Ganges in Bengal.'¹³¹ While the delta, with its shifting islands became an exceptionally fertile rural area in the medieval period, it continued to be plagued by recurrent catastrophes, including river floods which could inundate up to half of the country, and sometimes invasions by the sea. Even in very recent times, the Brahmaputra is known to have claimed forever 16 square kilometres of land in a single night. Local tradition provides a mythical origin to the Ganges delta which evokes the violence of the changes that has accompanied, in the course of time, the encounter of river and sea.¹³² Between the twelfth and the sixteenth century the entire Bengal river system underwent profound modifications, including a gradual shift eastwards which brought about the intensification of wet-rice cultivation and the expansion of a society of Muslim peasants in its wake.¹³³ More land is now under padi in the Gangetic plain than in the whole of China. Older cities of western Bengal were eclipsed by new cities in the east. The coast itself has again advanced considerably since the sixteenth century, and the archaeological remains of all the ports mentioned in early Portuguese accounts are today much farther from the open sea than they were then. Due to the silting and drying up of river channels, the ports of Sonargaon and Satgaon lost their importance in the early sixteenth century.¹³⁴ The great city

¹³⁰ W. A. Inglis, 'Some of the problems set us by the rivers of Bengal', *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, New series, V (1909), pp. 393–405; N. D. Bhattacharya, 'Changing Courses of the Padma and Human Settlements', *National Geographic Journal of India*, 24, nos 1 & 2 (1978), pp. 62–76; D. Schwartz, *Delta: The Perils, Profits and Politics of Water in South and Southeast Asia* (London, 1997).

¹³¹ I. H. Siddiqi and Q. M. Ahmad (transl.), *A Fourteenth Century Arab Account of India under Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq (Being an English Translation of the Chapters on India from Shihab al-Din al-'Umari's Masalik al-absar fi-mamalik al-amsar)* (Aligarh, 1971), p. 31.

¹³² G. Bouchon and L. F. Thomaz, *Voyage dans les Deltas du Gange et de l'Irraouaddy. Relation Portugaise Anonyme (1521)* (Paris, 1988), p. 170.

¹³³ R. M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1993).

¹³⁴ *Duarte Barbosa, II*, p. 140, note.

of Gaur was the capital of Bengal prior to the sixteenth century, commanding the opening to the delta at the confluence of the Ganges and the Mahananda, and regulating access to Sonargaon and Chittagong, but was abandoned by 1575.¹³⁵ The flight of the river eastwards left many lost rivers in the moribund delta while at the same time vast new areas were made inhabitable. At the end of the eighteenth century, when the first systematic study of the lower basin of the Ganges was undertaken by James Rennell, there were no less than eight mouths which at one time or another had been the principal channel of the Ganges.¹³⁶

The enormous triangle of land which the Indian peninsula projects into the ocean has given it a privileged position in maritime life. But rivers of the peninsula, while important in many places for agriculture and generally as sources of water, are rarely navigable, except in their estuaries and coastal plains, and this factor severely limited inland river traffic.¹³⁷ The rivers Chambal, Narmada and Tapi provided Malwa with an extensive agricultural basis. And in the Deccan and the South such rivers as the Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri have also been exploited by large-scale agricultural communities from early times; in their coastal plains on the eastcoast, with seasonally heavy rain, wet padi has been extensively cultivated. More characteristically, however, the geomorphological character of the Deccan plateau, with its forest-covered uplands and agriculturally marginal semi-arid jungle zones between river basins, has ensured that settlement was more varied and isolated here than in the northern plains.¹³⁸ Consistent with the ecology of the region, many communities in peninsular India retained a balance of sedentary-agricultural and pastoral activities.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Bouchon and Thomaz, *Voyage*, pp. 141–2.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 169–72.

¹³⁷ A minor exception is the Mahanadi river, in Orissa, which was an artery of dense traffic from the plains of Chattisgarh to the ports of the delta, along which went cereals from the interior, and salt and manufactures from the coast. The peninsular rivers typically had not only poor navigability but could also be difficult to cross, since their banks were steep in many places (*KF*, p. 32; Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, II, pp. 15, 32–40; Duarte Barbosa, I, pp. 150–1, 158–9, 164–7, 170–1, 181–2 & II, pp. 133–5; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 48–49, 54–55).

¹³⁸ B. Stein, 'South India: Some General Considerations of the Region and its Early History', in: T. Raychaudhuri and I. Habib (eds), *The Cambridge History of India, Volume I, c. 1200–c. 1750* (Delhi, 1984), p. 17.

¹³⁹ B. Stein, *A History of India* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 24, 156.

In some poorly watered parts of the Deccan and the peninsular South, as well as in the northern zone of Sri Lanka, rulers made investments in agrarian development by the construction of tanks, or reservoirs for capturing rainwater and other drainage, by means of bunds and sluice works.¹⁴⁰ On the Malabar coast, except in a few southern portions of the coastal plain where there is canal and tank irrigation, moisture for cultivation in the areas behind the coastal backwaters has been almost exclusively dependent on the double monsoon (producing two crops per year), rather than river irrigation.

Generally, in the Deccan and the peninsula, the possibilities for silt deposition and the formation of alluvial plains are confined to the lowlands of the major eastward-flowing rivers.¹⁴¹ These plains are much smaller than in the north. But their mutability is almost as great, and we observe in these regions a pattern of environmental change that is similar to the north. The coastline of the Godavari delta has clearly changed direction over the centuries.¹⁴² In the delta of the Krishna, the mouths of the river are obstructed by deposits of salt and mud. In the Kaveri delta, river sedimentation and migration can be traced, through many abandoned sites, to very early times.¹⁴³ In the Karnataka, the bed of the Kaveri has gradually been raised by sediment of gravel and sand, and this rise had to be met by a corresponding elevation of the artificial embankment. Consequently the entire river, throughout its course in the Karnataka, was lifted as much as a meter above the surrounding countryside—a situation with great potential for hydraulic warfare. Further north, in Gujarat, the mudflats of the Mahi river, and silting, interfered, over hundreds of years, with navigation in the Gulf of Cambay, contributing to the decline of the port.¹⁴⁴ Chaul, once the most important port in the Konkan, was choked with sandbanks in the estuary of the Kondulika river by the end of the fifteenth century.¹⁴⁵ In Malabar, the decline of Cranganore was due to the water of the lagoon finding its way

¹⁴⁰ For Sri Lanka, cf. *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 359–60; for the Deccan, see Chapter III, p. 88.

¹⁴¹ Mate, *Water Management*, p. 8.

¹⁴² Harley and Woodward, *History of Cartography*, II-1, p. 261.

¹⁴³ Mate, *Water Management*, pp. 117–8.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, p. 117; S. Arasaratnam and A. Ray, *Masulipatnam and Cambay: a history of two port-towns, 1500–1800* (New Delhi, 1994), pp. 119 ff.

¹⁴⁵ J. Gerson Da Cunha, *History of Chaul and Bassein* (Bombay, 1876); *Duarte Barbosa*, I, pp. 158–9, and note 1.

into the sea near Cochin and the consequent drying up of the Cranganore channel from the beginning of the fourteenth century, while the progression of the offshore bar closed the port of Eli.¹⁴⁶ Mantai, in northeastern Sri Lanka, one of the few identifiable ports of the Anuradhapura period, became unusable for navigation due to sedimentation.¹⁴⁷ Old Kayal, once a famous port near the extreme southern part of India, opposite Sri Lanka, and the port of Korkai were both in the delta of the Tamraparni river, and had to be abandoned due to the accumulation of silt and the advance of the shore at the mouth of the river.¹⁴⁸

Because of influences of land and sea, as well as the availability of river estuaries, the situation in the peninsula favored an exceptionally large coastal trade. Such coastal trade, in terms of total tonnage and the number of boats involved, has probably always been more important than long-distance navigation.¹⁴⁹ In the past the small vessels used in this trade needed only the most rudimentary shelter, and they could be pulled onto the beach. To accommodate such traffic, there was an almost infinite number of minuscule anchoring points and maritime establishments, as well as small harbours, on India's peninsular coasts, either on the seaboard itself or in small bays and inlets, at the mouths of rivers and in lagunas.¹⁵⁰ The great historical ports, like Calicut in Malabar, Cambay and Surat in Gujarat, or Masulipatnam on the Coromandel, receiving the traffic from distant parts of the Indian Ocean, were invariably at the mouths of rivers. The same was true for a host of mid-size ports. But since these rivers were not navigable for any long distance inland, trade in these ports was dependent on caravan traffic through the arid and semi-arid parts of the subcontinent, especially on India's west-coast, in Gujarat and the Deccan.

¹⁴⁶ Duarte Barbosa, *II*, pp. 88-89, note 3; G. Bouchon and D. Lombard, 'The Indian Ocean in the Fifteenth Century', in: A. Das Gupta and M. N. Pearson (eds), *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800* (Delhi, 1987), p. 58.

¹⁴⁷ B. E. S. J. Bastiampillai, 'Maritime relations of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) up to the arrival of the Westerners', in: K. S. Mathew (ed.), *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History* (New Delhi, 1995), pp. 80-81.

¹⁴⁸ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, *I*, p. 81, note 2 & *II*, p. 271, note 1; Duarte Barbosa, *II*, pp. 122-3; Yule, *Marco Polo*, *II*, pp. 371-4.

¹⁴⁹ Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, *II*, pp. 40-42.

¹⁵⁰ Deloche, *La Circulation en Inde*, *II*, p. 42; Arasaratnam and Ray, *Masulipatnam and Cambay*, pp. 3, 24, 119 ff.; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, *I*, pp. 48-49, 54-55, 60-63; Duarte Barbosa, *I*, pp. 79-95, 136, 139, 142, 150-1, 156-9, 164-7, 170-1, 181-2, 185, 187, 193, 195-6 & *II*, pp. 120-8; Stein, 'South India', p. 18.



Map 3. Southeast Asia

The eastern parts of the Indian Ocean, from the Bay of Bengal to the Java Sea and the South China Sea, can again be characterized as an environment of rivers, alluvial plains, deltas, and sea-arms, with a decisive influence on the patterns of settlement and the formation of states generally. However, the plains of the Irrawaddy, Chao Phraya, and the Mekong, as well as the entire Malay-Indonesian archipelago, until recently were a region of remarkably low population density, not exceeding ten million in 1800, even if we include their hilly terrain and highlands.¹⁵¹ Malaya had about a quarter of a million people; Java perhaps four million, and Burma (Myanmar) less than two million.¹⁵² In the medieval period these figures must have been considerably lower still, and would have represented no more than a fraction—perhaps between five and twenty percent of the South Asian population figures. Typically, all land masses from which the rivers have emptied out on the Sunda Platform are fringed with huge, flat marshlands, and every delta in this area shows evidence of frequent migrations of rivers and river bed sedimentation in the lower reaches, with shifting patterns of irrigation and low population figures until as late as the turn of the nineteenth century. The Tonle Sap alluvial plain and lake in Cambodia are the result of Mekong sedimentation in more distant times. Here a shallow arm of the sea was turned into a plain and swamp as the lower Mekong built up mudflats; and, curiously, the Tonle Sap lake still contains fish that are adaptations of marine species.¹⁵³ The Malayan peninsula is flanked with broad alluvial plains created by small rivers whose deltas continued to be reshaped by the sea into compact belts of swamps.¹⁵⁴ Malacca, an estuarial port, was rendered useless by silting.¹⁵⁵ So was Baruas, once perhaps the second most important port of the peninsula.¹⁵⁶ The distributaries of the Chao Phraya, in Thailand, have changed their courses considerably in medieval times, and silting is a common problem here too, in the channels and the fields, and particularly in the river mouths.¹⁵⁷ The main channels once ran further to the west. Streams from the western mountains however

¹⁵¹ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 385.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 55, 301, 303.

¹⁵⁴ Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, p. 200.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

¹⁵⁶ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 107, note 1.

¹⁵⁷ Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, p. 187.

brought down substantial silt, raising the alluvial surface in the west and making it less reliable for padi rice cultivation by reducing the effect of sheet-floods, while the construction of tanks proved inadequate. The result is that there are now large areas of bushland in the west which serve as coarse grazing land for cattle, and historic ruins are to be found along the former channels which cover the plain. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the western distributaries were still the centres of farming activity; the Chao Phraya then reached the sea by the now silted-up Tachin river, and intensive rice cultivation was practiced in the Suphanburi area.

Settlement and the formation of states on the mainland followed the major north-south river corridors which facilitated agricultural expansion and gave access to the Indian Ocean.¹⁵⁸ States were consolidated in the basins of the Irrawaddy in Burma, the Chao Phraya in Thailand, the Tonle Sap in Cambodia, the Mekong in Laos and southern Vietnam, and the Song-koi in north and central Vietnam. In the western and central mainland, the invaders who developed these states came from the barren and inhospitable north, from areas which suffered from unreliable rainfall, not from the sea or the as yet undeveloped southern deltas. Thus the Burmans, who entered the central Irrawaddy plain by the ninth century, brought along agricultural conceptions of the dry rather than wet environment.¹⁵⁹ Under the Pagan rulers rice agriculture came to be irrigated through this river system.¹⁶⁰ By the fourteenth century the first state embracing the Irrawaddy basin and the adjacent Shan plateau emerged, and by the fifteenth century we witness the rise to dominance of the Mon coastal ports, in Pegu, Bassein, Syriam, and Martaban, in the river delta.¹⁶¹ The Irrawaddy drains about two-thirds of Burma's surface, and, with a navigable length of 1,400 kilometres (from Bhamo to the sea), it is by far the most important Burmese river, although there are several subsidiary river systems, notably those of the Chindwin, the Sittang and the Salween, with varying degrees of use-

¹⁵⁸ V. Lieberman, 'Local Integration and Eurasian Analogies: Structuring Southeast Asian History, c. 1350–c. 1830', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27, 3 (1993), p. 482.

¹⁵⁹ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, pp. 167–8; *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 346–51.

¹⁶⁰ *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 374–5.

¹⁶¹ A. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680, Volume II: Expansion and Crisis* (London and New Haven, 1993), pp. 54–55, 62–63; Major, *India*, II, p. 15; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 94, 97–98; *Duarte Barbosa*, II, pp. 149–50, 152–3, note 1, 154, 156–157, note 2.

fulness.¹⁶² The rivers of Arakan are small and unusable for navigation, except the Kaladan which can be used almost to Paletwa; in so far as they are important it is because it is only in their estuaries and lower zones of sedimentation that settlement of some density can occur. The longitudinal valleys of the folded Arakan Yoma range have remained largely unused except by scattered hill-tribes living on the healthier slopes and hill-tops where they practiced shifting cultivation.¹⁶³ Like those of Arakan, the rivers of the Tenasserim are short tropical streams with heavy silt loads, leading to rapid coastal sedimentation.¹⁶⁴ In the past some of these were used by merchants for harbourage and a trans-isthmus route but now almost none of them are still usable for sailing craft.

Similar to Burma, Thailand (*Siam*) has a south-facing trough form with a focus on a single major river system, the Chao Phraya, where rice cultivation came to dominate everything else, even though it never occupied more than a quarter of the surface.¹⁶⁵ The thickly forested western mountain range which, with its long valleys, extends into Burma and continues southward into the Kra Isthmus, as well as the northern mountains which are an extension of the Shan range, the Korat plateau in the east, and the Cardamom mountains in the southeast, have been irregularly inhabited, most commonly by shifting cultivators.¹⁶⁶ In a way similar to the earlier migration of the Burmans, the ancestors of the Thai began to disperse in the centuries after 1000 AD, moving from their barren northern homelands into areas as far west as Assam and as far south as modern Thailand.¹⁶⁷ The great Thai achievement was the settlement of the Chao Phraya valley and delta. Superseding Angkor in Cambodia, two major Thai states established themselves in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: Sukhothai and Chiangmai. With seaborne commerce with China and Indonesia expanding, by the fifteenth century power shifted to

¹⁶² Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, pp. 154–8, 160–1, 193; Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, pp. 54, 60–61; *Al-Hind, I*, p. 348; Major, *India, II*, pp. 10, 15. The Salween, with its narrow, ribbon-like drainage basin, is probably the least useful major river in Burma.

¹⁶³ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, pp. 154, 193; Major, *India, II*, p. 10; *Duarte Barbosa, II*, p. 150.

¹⁶⁴ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 155.

¹⁶⁵ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, pp. 259, 263–4, 270; Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, pp. 178, 185–6.

¹⁶⁶ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, pp. 259, 261–3.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *Al-Hind, II*, pp. 377–9.

trade-based cities.¹⁶⁸ Hence the new capital of Ayudhya emerged at exactly the point in the river at which ocean-going ships give way to river traffic.¹⁶⁹ The Chao Phraya system is navigable up to Phitsanulok, making northern Thailand a place difficult to reach and effectively an extension of the Shan hill states (whose currencies they shared until recently).¹⁷⁰ To the south, Thailand in the fifteenth century exercised supremacy over the Kra Isthmus and large parts of the Malay peninsula, with their seaports in the river estuaries (kuala) on both sides (Tenasserim, Junkceylon, Terram, Kedah, Patani, Kelanten, Baruas, Johore, Perak, Malacca, and numerous others).¹⁷¹ Here there were also overland connections between east and west, such as the Takuapa-Bandon route which was used by small river boats, with a short portage section in the forest.¹⁷² By the fifteenth century the deltaic plains on the coasts to the northeast and northwest, with their ports, were becoming the nuclei of Muslim-Malay states, with self-contained padi farming and fishing economies, but also producing pepper, and minerals such as tin and gold.

In Cambodia, from the fifteenth century onwards, the capital of Phnom Penh was, like Ayudhya, located at a point which could still be reached by ocean-going ships, at the junction of the Tonle Sap and Mekong. The Mekong, from its source on the Tibetan plateau to the South China Sea, passes, under a variety of names, through China, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, and, with 4,500 kilometres is one of the world's largest rivers.¹⁷³ Its water supply is essential to agriculture in southern Laos, Cambodia and the ever-expanding deltaic region of southern Vietnam. When the monsoon adds its rain to the melting snow that feeds the river in Tibet, the Mekong floods the sun-parched padi fields, irrigating the lands along its course and leaving a rich silt on the floodplains.¹⁷⁴ The amount of water in the river during the flood season is so enormous that it starts to back up along its tributary the Tonle Sap, at Phnom Penh, thus reversing

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 103–6; Duarte Barbosa, II, pp. 162–3.

¹⁶⁹ Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 54.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*; Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 284–5.

¹⁷¹ Duarte Barbosa, II, pp. 162–3; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 103–7 & II, pp. 232–44; Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, pp. 207–8.

¹⁷² Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 261; Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, p. 197.

¹⁷³ M. Osborne, *River Road to China: The Mekong River Expedition 1866–1873* (New York, 1975), p. 15; Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, pp. 177–8.

¹⁷⁴ Osborne, *River Road to China*, p. 16.

the flow of the latter river into a northern direction.¹⁷⁵ The water flowing backwards up the Tonle Sap replenishes the Great Lake in central Cambodia and starts a breeding cycle for fish, so that after the rains have stopped a mass of fish is brought down when the river starts to flow south again.¹⁷⁶

The most ancient civilization with its centre in the Mekong delta and the basin of the Tonle Sap or 'Great Lake' had been that of Funan.¹⁷⁷ In its deltaic port of Oc Eo a significant number of Roman and western Asian objects have been found.¹⁷⁸ When Funan was bypassed by the Chinese trade, the rice lands of the upper Mekong delta were beginning to be developed. This was centuries before any great drainage efforts were made, and the lower Mekong area was then still a patchwork of lakes and streams, a scene of faster silt deposition and more dangerous inundation than early technology could deal with.¹⁷⁹ As a contemporary Chinese traveler put it, one could 'sail through Cambodia'.¹⁸⁰ During the seventh century, in the still primeval forests of the north, the Mekong provided a passage for the Khmers who were migrating southwards from an area which is now in southern Laos.¹⁸¹ One of the earliest Khmer inscriptions stood in the riverbed, affirming piety to the Hindu god Sambhu (Shiva), the name of which is reflected in the name of a village nearby, below a series of Mekong rapids.¹⁸² From here, the Khmer went on to found the Cambodian kingdom of Angkor, where they further developed rice agriculture, especially in the Tonle Sap area, at the same time initiating commercial communication along the river systems of the Mekong and the Chao Phraya.¹⁸³ The Mekong and its tributaries thus became vital arteries for travel and trade, as well as for military campaigns, from early times. The Chams sailed their warships up the Mekong and the Tonle Sap to attack Angkor from the Great Lake. The Chinese envoy Chou Ta-kuan followed the same route in 1296. Chinese connections are likely to have

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 342-4.

¹⁷⁸ Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 65; L. Malleret, *L'archéologie du delta du Mekong*, 4 vols (Paris, 1959-63).

¹⁷⁹ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 303.

¹⁸⁰ Osborne, *River Road to China*, p. 17.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 344-6.

encouraged the emergence of the new capital at Phnom Penh as well.¹⁸⁴ After Angkor had begun to decline, a new Tai principality emerged in the fourteenth century at Luang Prabang, on the upper Mekong, in Laos. By the sixteenth century it was able to move its capital to the fertile plains and the long navigable stretch of the middle Mekong, to Vientiane.¹⁸⁵ When, in the mid-sixteenth century, a Portuguese missionary, Father Da Cruz, traveled on the Mekong, he discovered that merchants from distant Laos descended the river to trade in the capital of Lovek, on the Tonle Sap.¹⁸⁶ But, like other early European visitors, he was unable to obtain any real knowledge of the Mekong to the north of Vientiane.¹⁸⁷ The isolation of the intermontane valleys of interior Laos, where shifting cultivation was practiced by the Man, Liao, Moi and Lolo hill-peoples, is long-standing.¹⁸⁸ In effect, there were formidable natural barriers (like numerous, seemingly endless, rapids and falls) to navigation even in the lower reaches of the river between Phnom Penh and Vientiane. Laotian merchants took as long as three months to make their way back up the river between those two cities.¹⁸⁹

The Indonesian archipelago, with a length of over 3,600 kilometres, is the only large-scale equatorial environment which is easily accessible through stretches of sea.¹⁹⁰ It also has sheltered lagoons behind the coasts, and rivers serving as trade arteries running through forests and swamps. People from India, China, Arabia, Persia, and later Europe have been using these waterways for centuries. The islands, however, all followed to a large extent their own historical trajectories, depending in part on the accessibility of their interiors. Java was the most densely inhabited island and the cultural and political focus of much of the archipelago, with political power centred around the productive riverine and volcanic zones, or in the amphibious coastal fringes at the mouths of navigable rivers—the most important of which were the Solo and the Brantas, both penetrating deeply into the interior. Java was the only island which resembled the

¹⁸⁴ Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, pp. 206–7.

¹⁸⁵ Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, p. 210.

¹⁸⁶ Osborne, *River Road to China*, p. 19.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, pp. 180, 196.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20; Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, pp. 53–57.

¹⁹⁰ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, pp. 196–7; Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, p. 199.

Southeast-Asian mainland demographically and politically. 'Outer islands' like Sumatra, Kalimantan or Irian Jaya were covered by forests and here, again, coastal people were often relatively isolated from the interior, as in parts of the eastcoast of Africa. Even Sumatra combined a cosmopolitan, coastal civilization with ties to India, China and Arabia, with an inland culture that has invariably been described as 'savage' and as the domain of 'naked cannibals' by early Muslim and European authors alike.¹⁹¹

On an abstract level, two major types of Indonesian political systems can be identified.¹⁹² One, that of the inland, agriculture-oriented societies of Central Java, based on alluvial river plains, and comparable in their settlement patterns to those of the drainage basins of the Irrawaddy, the Chao Phraya, and the Tonle Sap/Mekong. Two, that of the commercial city states and entrepôts of the thinly-populated coastlines of the large landmasses of all the other islands of the Indonesian archipelago and of the Malay peninsula. From a geographical point of view, the latter states were primarily focused on a river and the sea, involving the control of a drainage basin opening to the sea by a centre located at or near the mouth of the major channel of the river. River-mouth city states were the rule everywhere south of Thailand and outside of Java.¹⁹³ Ephemeral in their physical lay-out, rising and falling with striking rapidity, and making sparing use of politico-religious monuments, the river-mouth states of the archipelago differed from those found elsewhere on the Indian Ocean littoral by their typically much greater (although certainly not unique) dependence on forested hinterlands with dispersed and mobile populations and, hence, a relatively unusual and specialized pattern of export trade.¹⁹⁴ With infertile hinterlands marred by limited cultivation, small populations, and a small and specialized economic production, historically known coastal states in the region were dependent on trade even for necessities.¹⁹⁵ Typically, the interfluvial countryside of the drainage basin was either marshy, forested or mountainous,

¹⁹¹ Cf. *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 351-5; II, pp. 285-93.

¹⁹² B. Bronson, 'Exchange at the Upstream and Downstream Ends: Notes toward a Functional Model of the Coastal State in Southeast Asia', in: K. L. Hutterer (ed.), *Economic Exchange and Social Interaction in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from Prehistory, History, and Ethnography* (Ann Arbor, 1977), pp. 39-52.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 51-52.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

so that all movement of goods was confined to water routes, while the basin itself also did not have the agricultural potential to permit the development of a true peasant society.¹⁹⁶ The resulting economic network was closely congruent with the dendritic pattern formed by the main river and its tributaries, comprising the initial concentration points for forest-gathered and swidden-grown products originating in the most remote parts of the watershed.¹⁹⁷ Wars between such river-mouth based states, accompanied by a high incidence of population transfers, were frequent, and the entire political configuration of the region was, hence, in a constant flux.

Shrivijaya was the longest lasting and the epitome of such Indonesian rivermouth states with a maritime orientation. Among modern interpreters of Shrivijaya, O. W. Wolters confirms that here 'perhaps the most obvious feature of the landscape is its extraordinary access to riverine communications' and that the most significant spatial unit was not the capital city but a network of settlements up and down the river.¹⁹⁸ Wolters presents Shrivijaya as a 'paddle-based culture' in which 'neighbourly obedience in a riverine landscape represented . . . a spatial integration comparable with the congregations of small shrines around the royal temples in central Java.'¹⁹⁹ Local craft manned by peddlars could make the 80 kilometres journey from Palembang to the estuary of the Musi in a few hours during the ebbing tide, and goods sent to the Pasemah region were brought upriver to Muara Malang, close to the foothills of the Barisan mountain range, over 480 kilometres in fourteen days, and then by land to the Pasemah in one day.²⁰⁰ This 'riverine situation,' in which readily mobilized paddle-power made permanent fortifications unnecessary, was characterized by the absence of elaborately walled cities.²⁰¹ The capital, with defence works made of earth, felled trees, and bamboo, was nonetheless a major entrepôt where, in addition to extracted riverine produce, commercial products from all over the Indian Ocean were exchanged.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 44 ff.

¹⁹⁸ O. W. Wolters, 'Studying Srivijaya', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 52, 2 (1979), pp. 17, 21; see also J. Miksic, 'Classical Archaeology in Sumatra', *Indonesia*, 30 (1980), pp. 43-44.

¹⁹⁹ Wolters, 'Studying Srivijaya', p. 18.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

The coastal marsh in which Shrivijaya was situated, occupying the least populated zone of Sumatra and about half of the island, was produced by prolonged sedimentation of tropical rivers flowing eastward from the Barisan mountains into the shallow sea of the Strait of Malacca.²⁰³ Such sedimentation, beginning at least five thousand years ago, was aided by volcanic eruption in inner Sumatra in medieval times, as well as by forest cutting, heavy rainfall, and tectonic movement. The eastern flatlands, with their crocodile-ridden rivers and mangrove forests, are amphibious areas which are even now frequently inundated by tides during the rainy season. In places, the alluvial swamps extend inward from the now relatively even coastline for as much as 240 kilometres, giving the island its peculiarly bulging shape. Sumatran folklore is full of legends of coastal change. It appears that in earlier times several large bays or estuaries indented the eastcoast. Very rapid changes in the coastline probably caused the decline of large kingdoms in eastern Sumatra in the 'Kelasik' period (fourth to late fifteenth century). Most of the region, extending along two-thirds of the eastcoast, from Tanjungbalai downwards, has been unsuited for human habitation, especially since the thirteenth century, when the thick swamp forests became increasingly malaria-infested—a factor contributing significantly to the decline of Shrivijaya.²⁰⁴ The whole region was an area of frequent natural calamities. Settlements along rivers have often been obliterated when mud-flows swept down loose ashes from volcanoes.²⁰⁵ The name 'Dungai Mati' or 'Dead River' occurs at times in the lowlands, indicating that the death of a river is recorded in local memory. The confluence of the Musi and Upang rivers, now 40 kilometres from the Bangka Strait, was as much a riverine as a coastal site in Shrivijayan times.²⁰⁶ And the southern shore of the Musi opposite of Palembang was then probably an archipelago of gradually enlarged mud islands. Alluvial soil suitable for wet rice cultivation is found mainly near the river courses, including those that have become silted in. Villages on their banks are separated by long distances.

²⁰³ Cf. Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, pp. 301, 383–4; Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, pp. 210–12.

²⁰⁴ Ch. Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784–1847* (London and Malmö, 1983), p. 7; *Al-Hind, II*, p. 164.

²⁰⁵ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, pp. 198–202; Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, p. 210; Miksic, 'Classical Archaeology', pp. 43–46.

²⁰⁶ Wolters, 'Studying Srivijaya.'

The rivers across the swamps are however navigable, in spite of the shifting sandbanks, and this established east-west lines of communication. Some of the eastcoast rivers allow ocean-going ships to sail far inland; the port of Jambi, for instance, is over 100 kilometres up the Barang Hari, while Palembang is about 93 kilometres up the Musi.

By the end of the fifteenth century every navigable river in Sumatra had become the site of a small coastal state with a ruler able to mobilize a riverine neighbourhood and with overseas connections, the most famous of them still being those of the east and southeast of the island, where there was little fertile land, at some distance from the producing areas, and sending tribute to Malacca or Java.²⁰⁷ The Shrivijayan empire had broken up, allowing older centres to re-emerge with greater independence, some of which may have corresponded with states that had sent missions to China before the late seventh century, or with those described in the Cola inscriptions of the eleventh century, when they were raided from South India.²⁰⁸ Barbosa writes that 'the great and beautiful Island of Camatra . . . has many very prosperous seaports, the more part of them occupied by Moors but some by Heathen, but for the most part the Heathen dwell inland.'²⁰⁹ Palembang, the main focus of the riverine network of the former Shrivijayan empire, was on the banks of the relatively broad and (by Sumatran standards) very mature Air Musi. Like the other river states of eastern Sumatra—Jambi, Indragiri and Siak—it was situated near the transshipment point between ocean-going and river craft.²¹⁰ In the late fourteenth century Palembang had begun a new life as a centre for Chinese and Muslim *Orang Laut*, over whom Chwang Ho established some kind of Chinese authority in 1407.²¹¹ No city in any conventional sense of the term ever existed, in this period, in the creek-riddled landscape of the Air Musi estuary at modern Palembang.²¹² Much the same can be said about

²⁰⁷ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 154; Duarte Barbosa, II, p. 187, note 2; Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, pp. 207–8.

²⁰⁸ Miksic, 'Classical Archaeology', pp. 48–50.

²⁰⁹ Duarte Barbosa, II, p. 182.

²¹⁰ Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 54; Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 201.

²¹¹ J. V. G. Mills (ed. and transl.), *Ma Huan, Ying-yai Sheng-lan [The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores]* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 98–100; Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 207.

²¹² Wolters, 'Studying Srivijaya', pp. 25, 28; O. W. Wolters, 'A note on Sungsang village at the estuary of the Musi River in southeastern Sumatra: a reconsideration of the historical geography of the Palembang region', *Indonesia*, 27 (1979), pp. 33–50.

Jambi, the emporium of *Malayu* to which Shrivijaya lost its preeminent position in Sumatra in the late eleventh century, located near Muara Jambi further up the eastcoast on the Batang Hari river. Archaeological remains at Muara Jambi point at Malayu's importance in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²¹³ Some brick structures may have existed at this site. The Sultan of Jambi is said to have built his palace of bricks from their ruins, but nothing remains of them.²¹⁴ Ceramics found in the area are of no earlier date than the fifteenth century. Most importantly, the Jambi territories, through which flows one of the largest and most beautiful rivers in Sumatra, were accessible from the Minangkabau lands of Central Sumatra overland through the piedmont.²¹⁵ The regional designation of *Malayu*, dating from as early as the seventh century, in fact, appears to have referred to the deep hinterland reaching into the Minangkabau highlands as well as the riverine plains in which we have to situate the port of Jambi proper.²¹⁶ In the fifteenth century, the trade of the port of Jambi consisted of gold dust, pepper and canes.²¹⁷ The gold was mined in the Minangkabau highlands and was also washed out of the earth of the riverbeds. 'Mananco . . . is the principal source of the mined gold found in this island,' writes Barbosa. 'It is like that found on the shores of streams and rivers, a wonderful thing . . . gold found here, which they take to Malaca in dust.'²¹⁸

It was the rivers flowing east—the Indragiri, the Kampar and the Siak, and their tributaries—and not the east Sumatran alluvial land-mass itself, that were important to the Minangkabau world in the highlands.²¹⁹ Through these meandering rivers, with their constantly changing courses, the highlands have, over the centuries, been able to communicate with the commercial world of the straits, and hence far beyond. Linked to one another by an intricate network of waterways, they are navigable for ocean-going ships for a considerable distance inland, and local vessels can go up to the Bukit Barisan slopes. Through the gold trade, external influences, particularly from

²¹³ *Al-Hind*, II, p. 288.

²¹⁴ F. M. Schnitger, *Hindoe-Oudheden aan de Batang Hari* (Leiden, 1936), p. 5.

²¹⁵ Cf. Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 154 and note 1; Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 207.

²¹⁶ Wolters, 'Studying Shrivijaya', p. 23; *Duarte Barbosa*, II, pp. 186–7, and note 3.

²¹⁷ *Duarte Barbosa*, II, pp. 186–7, note 3.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

²¹⁹ Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 6–7, 46–47.

South India, had begun to make themselves felt in the Tanah Datar region of the Minangkabau highlands by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²²⁰ By the fourteenth century the highlands had built a powerful state and commercial system on the same basis, superseding the eastcoast in importance.²²¹ Throughout these centuries, the river outlets on the eastcoast remained essential, and, in addition to Jambi and Palembang, there appears to have been a number of other river-based centres which served as transmission points for trading products of this part of Central Sumatra, most important of which, by the end of the fifteenth century, was still the gold.²²² Intensive agriculture and dense populations also developed mainly on the fertile volcanic plateaus of the west, among such hill communities as the Minangkabau and the Batak, and in the alluvial plains of the north-coast (the later Achin), which were all close to external routes of communication. Without the river highways linking it to the outside world, the Minangkabau would not have been able to realize its agricultural potential and would probably have developed in virtual isolation, like so much of Sumatra. Blanketed with equatorial rain-forest, Sumatra has historically been dependent more on shifting cultivation than on sedentary farming, and many of the hill peoples depended on roots, the oldest indigenous form of food cultivation.

There were at least five more riverine trading states on the east Sumatran coast. On the Indragiri, there was a kingdom of the same name, Barbosa's *Andragao*.²²³ It was bounded on the south by the land of Tongkal, also named after a river, and to the north by what Pires named 'the land of Campocan,' which was probably another state, centred on the small river of Kateman.²²⁴ Immediately to the north of that area we find in the fifteenth century a settlement on the Kampar river which was the centre of a considerable kingdom, over which the Minangkabau claimed titular rights and the rulers of which were related to the kings of Malacca.²²⁵ Characteristically, the land of Kampar was sterile, but one could travel up the river for seven or eight days; upstream there was Muara Takus, a site

²²⁰ *Al-Hind*, II, p. 289.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 164, and notes 1 and 2.

²²³ *Duarte Barbosa*, II, p. 186.

²²⁴ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 152-3, and notes.

²²⁵ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 150-1; *Duarte Barbosa*, II, pp. 185-6.

with temples consisting of a complex of brick structures estimated to date back to a period between the eighth and fourteenth centuries and which may have been linked to the barren Padang Lawas or 'Great Plain' region.²²⁶ Padang Lawas (or more precisely Padang Bolak) was about 96 kilometres to the north, on the eastern fringe of the Barisan mountain range, the site of the kingdom of Panai or 'Pannai' and located at the point of easiest passage between the east- and westcoast in the entire mountain chain. Most of the temple remains here date from between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with some older ones and some of later date.²²⁷ There is evidence of important external trade from places across this area, which had access to the valuable forest resins of the Bukit Barisan as well as alluvial gold deposits in the south. Two large rivers originate in the plain, the Barumun and the Panai, both flowing eastwards, but archaeological research still has to explore the possibility that there may be remains of an emporium near the mouth of either of these rivers.²²⁸ As it is, there are only two important river states along the mid-Sumatran eastcoast to the north of Kampar about which we have solid knowledge. One was that of Siak, a country which 'contains large rivers which come far inland.'²²⁹ The other is Aru, on the Rakan (modern Delo) river, the only state on the central portion of the eastcoast which is mentioned by the Chinese accounts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, under the name of *A-lu*, chiefly as a source of aromatic drugs.²³⁰ Pires says of the king of Aru that 'he is the greatest king in all Sumatra, and the most powerful in plundering raids. He is a Moor and lives in the hinterland, and has many rivers in his country. The land itself is marshy and cannot be penetrated.'²³¹ The Rakan is the largest river of Sumatra and often difficult to navigate, especially at its mouth.²³² Inland, the kingdom of Aru extended into the Minangkabau and the Batak lands, and here river navigation appears to have been good.²³³ The association

²²⁶ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 151; Miksic, 'Classical Archaeology', pp. 56-59; *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 288-9.

²²⁷ Miksic, 'Classical Archaeology', pp. 58-59; *Al-Hind*, II, p. 288.

²²⁸ Miksic, 'Classical Archaeology', p. 59.

²²⁹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 149; Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 54.

²³⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 147-8; Duarte Barbosa, II, pp. 185-8.

²³¹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 147.

²³² Duarte Barbosa, II, p. 185, note 1.

²³³ Cf. Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 148: 'Some of the land of Aru is in the land of

of Aru with the Bataks or 'Battas' explains why the early Portuguese accounts consider the inhabitants of the state to have been 'Heathen who are the eaters of human flesh.'²³⁴

The Batak lands around Lake Toba were really a hinterland for a much larger part of Sumatra's northeast coast and had multiple river-based trade outlets, through which horses, gold, rice, cassia, tree resins like camphor and benzoin, and other vegetable and animal products of the North-Sumatran forests and mountains were exchanged with the outside world for salt, cloth and iron.²³⁵ It is possible that the relative importance of the various ports on this coast varied in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but this is not easy to establish in the current state of our knowledge. It may be speculated that prior to the rise of Aru the port at the archaeological site of Kota Cina ('fortified Chinese settlement'), near Medan's port of Belawan, at the confluence of the Belawan and Delo rivers, was more important.²³⁶ This site was intensively occupied for perhaps 100 to 150 years in the period between the twelfth and fourteenth century and counted South-Indian and Chinese trader communities among its inhabitants. Some of the coins found on the site originated from Sri Lanka. Potsherds possibly made their way here from the Persian Gulf, and the site contained thousands of copper coins from China, as well as a great deal of high-quality porcelain. Up the Deli river, about 12 kilometres inland from the mouth, another site, Kota Jawa, turned up Chinese porcelain of the Sung and Yuan dynasties, while at Deli Tua, 30 kilometres inland, there are two more fortifications where northern Thai and Sung-Ming earthenware and porcelain have appeared.²³⁷ The location of these inland sites is significant. Kota Jawa marks the point where the land becomes more suitable for agriculture and less marshy than the flood-prone area downstream. And near Deli Tua the Deli river becomes navigable, the Karo plateau giving way to coastal lowland, providing a good location for the regulation of trade along the high-land-lowland route.²³⁸

Minangkabau, and there they have great rivers inland along which the whole island of Sumatra can be navigated.'

²³⁴ *Duarte Barbosa, II*, p. 186; Pires, *Suma Oriental, I*, p. 146.

²³⁵ *Al-Hind, II*, pp. 298-90.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 290; Miksic, 'Classical Archaeology', pp. 62-64.

²³⁷ Miksic, 'Classical Archaeology', p. 64.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

Further up the northeast coast, the early Islamic states of Samudra-Pasai, Perlak, Samalanga, and Pedir (Pidie) were located at or near the end of short, fast-flowing rivers descending from the Bukit Barisan.²³⁹ Some of these states had extensive trading contacts as far as South India and China, and in this area of Sumatra pepper cultivation had become important by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as had the production of silk.²⁴⁰ Particularly Pedir had long been famous as a pepper port. Achin was the first country on the tip of Sumatra, with rivers running through it, but as yet of little significance. The rise of Achin was to occur after the arrival of the Portuguese.²⁴¹

The contrast between the east- and westcoast of Sumatra could hardly be more striking. The Strait between Sumatra and the Malay peninsula represents one of the Indonesian archipelago's most sheltered waterways, devoid of dangerous coral reefs, studded with intermediate insular ports of call, and liberally endowed with estuarial ports.²⁴² The westcoast of Sumatra had numerous navigational problems. Exposed to the full force of the monsoon, it had tempestuous seas and heavy surf, while at the end of the monsoon season dangerous shifting bars would form and the mouths of rivers shift or silt up.²⁴³ Coastal coral reefs prevailed here and suitable anchorage places and sheltered bays were few and mainly confined to a very small part of the coastline south of modern Padang and to one or two coral islets offshore to the north.²⁴⁴ Since the watershed between east- and west-flowing rivers is hardly anywhere more than 50 kilometres from the westcoast, the rivers which disgorge themselves from the mountains are navigable only for a very short distance from the coast. The narrow coastal plains of the westcoast also posed obstacles to human habitation.²⁴⁵ Near the ocean, the plains turn into sand dunes, covered with coconut palms or casuarina trees, and between these and the Bukit Barisan foothills lie swampy lagoons and marshes where malaria has long been endemic. While some of the larger

²³⁹ *Al-Hind*, II, p. 191.

²⁴⁰ *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 291-2; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 138, 142-4; Duarte Barbosa, II, pp. 181-3.

²⁴¹ Cf. Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 138-9.

²⁴² Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 5.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

rivers have built extensive alluvial flatlands in which settled agriculture is feasible, in many parts of the coast plains disappear entirely and mountain spurs coming down to the coast make it wild and rocky.²⁴⁶ An exception on Sumatra's westcoast was Barus, its oldest—river-based—port, which features in Arab accounts (under the name of 'Fansur') in the ninth century, boasts an inscription establishing the presence of a Tamil trading guild in the eleventh century, and has the oldest collection of imported ceramics and the earliest Muslim grave dated in the island (1206/7).²⁴⁷ Barus was the most important centre for the export of Sumatra's camphor, the most prized variety of which came from a limited area on a tributary of the Singkel river. Pires still speaks of

'the very rich kingdom of Baros, which is also called Panchur or Pansur . . . [and which] is at the head of the trade in these things in all the island of Sumatra, because this is the port of call through which the gold goes, and the silk, benzoin, camphor in quantities, apothecary's signaloes, wax, honey, and other things in which this kingdom is more plentiful than any of the others up to now.'²⁴⁸

If control of a drainage basin of a river and limited interfluvial agricultural development in a forested, marshy or mountainous environment in Sumatra was typically associated with a low level of monumentality, in Java a relatively dense distribution of Hindu monuments, or *candi*, of the pre-Muslim era is almost *prima facie* evidence for the existence of a peasant-based society.²⁴⁹ Here, the debris of some 85 volcanoes—17 still active and 18 newly dormant—which run lengthwise down the middle of the island is washed down by rivers to supply the nutrients that allow the otherwise thin soils to maintain fertility despite prolonged cultivation.²⁵⁰ Such fertile soils, constantly replenished by further ejecta from the volcanoes, are found both inland among the mountains and along the coast on the river-transported alluvials. Wet-rice agriculture flourished in Java since the

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ L. van Vuren, 'De handel van Barus, als oudste haven op Sumatra's Westkust verklaard,' *Tijdschrift van het Aardrijkskundig Genootschap*, 25 (1908); Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 160–1; Miksic, 'Classical Archaeology,' pp. 59–62; *Al-Hind*, I, p. 288.

²⁴⁸ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 161.

²⁴⁹ Bronson, 'Exchange at the Upstream and Downstream Ends,' p. 51.

²⁵⁰ Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, pp. 205–6; Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 228; C. Geertz, *Agricultural Involvement: The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1963), p. 38.

beginning of the Christian era, beginning in all likelihood in the central and eastern parts of the island, in the enclosed inner reaches of the northward-flowing rivers or in the upper basins of the generally shorter southward-flowing ones.²⁵¹ Over time, the gradually sloping surfaces of the increasingly more densely peopled intermontane valleys were levelled into terraces for padi growing. Such *sawah* cultivation is dependent on rainfall as well as irrigation by water diverted from the streams and rivers.²⁵² Java, however, has been densely settled only in restricted areas. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries much of it remained forested, and there were then, as now, many areas in which porous limestone occurs, and others which are too cold and windy for farming, while a great deal of bare rock and bush prevails along the southcoast. Javanese agriculture did not yet have the great intensity and variety that it was to develop in Dutch times, when it was geared to produce exportable cash crops.²⁵³ Pires emphasizes that in Java (and Sunda) the chief merchandise are 'infinite quantities of rice of four or five kinds, and very white, better than anywhere else' as well as other foodstuffs, vegetables, livestock, and pepper.²⁵⁴ The flowering of the port towns depended to a large degree on the ability to provide rice and control rice deliveries of the peasants in the interior and the alluvial coastal plains.²⁵⁵

The northern rivers are much more important in the geography of Java than the southern ones, and historically this has led to a situation in which all major states were situated in the north, just as in Sumatra they were almost always in the east. The main watershed of the island, in most parts, lies much closer to the south- than to the northcoast, so that only a third of the island is drained to the south.²⁵⁶ Only exceptionally, mostly in the middle and in the eastern corner, the watershed is closer to the northcoast; here the southcoast has extensive lowland plains and these contain the large drainage areas of the Tanduwi, Seraju, Bongowonto, Bondojudo, and Majang.²⁵⁷

²⁵¹ Geertz, *Agricultural Involvement*, p. 42.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41; Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, p. 206.

²⁵³ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 228; Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, p. 206.

²⁵⁴ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 180; and see pp. 168–171, 183–6, 189, 191, 198.

²⁵⁵ H. J. De Graaf and Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, *De Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen op Java: Studien over de Staatkundige Geschiedenis van de 15de en 16de Eeuw* ('s-Gravenhage, 1974), p. 24.

²⁵⁶ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 225; P. J. Veth, *Java, Geografisch, Ethnologisch, Historisch*, 4 Volumes (Haarlem, 1896–1907), III, pp. 146–7.

²⁵⁷ Veth, *Java*, III, p. 146.

Everywhere else, along the long mountainous coasts of east and west Java, the watershed is located far to the south. This had a favourable effect on waterborne traffic to the north, which concentrates overwhelmingly in the Java Sea. Many of the numerous northward-flowing rivers in Java have been navigable, at least in their most significant parts, for rivercraft, until heavy deforestation in modern times caused them to silt up completely.²⁵⁸ Even the smaller northward-flowing rivers are known to have been important transportation routes from early times, intersecting at numerous points with landroads, where ferries were extensively used, and wagons.²⁵⁹ The favourable effect of the southern position of the watershed is least in evidence in the Prianger, due to the circumstance that here there are merely two drainage basins which extend far to the south, and the rivers of both, the Tarum and the Manoeck, reach the plains through deep gorges, in which they are unnavigable altogether.²⁶⁰ The sources of the Tjimanoeck, the river which separated the Sunda lands from Java proper, are only 27 kilometres removed from the southcoast. To the east of the Tjimanoeck, the main watershed follows the Galung-gungputri chain and shifts no less than 55 kilometres to the north.²⁶¹ The predominance of the north over the south is most fully realized to the east of this area, in the broad eastern portion of the island, in the drainage basins of the Solo and, even more, that of the Brantas. Here, in one place, the Bay of Gemah, the watershed is merely 1 kilometre removed from the southern sea.²⁶² And, while in the Solo the Ngawai gorge still hinders traffic somewhat, the Brantas runs through flat plains from the south to the northcoast. The Solo (or Bengawan) and the Brantas are the longest rivers of Java, in the middle-east where the island is broadest, and both rivers were major arteries of trade until the eighteenth century, with rice and cotton being taken down on numerous long, shallow vessels to the port cities at their mouths during the high-water season, and salt and other trade goods being taken back to the Surakarta plain on the

²⁵⁸ Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 54.

²⁵⁹ Veth, *Java*, I, pp. 53–55; De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, p. 26; Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, *Java in the Fourteenth Century, A Study in Cultural History: The Nāgara-Kertāgama by Rakawi Prapanca of Majapahit, 1365 A.D.*, 5 Volumes (The Hague, 1960), V, pp. 416–32; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 191.

²⁶⁰ Veth, *Java*, III, p. 146.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

Solo and to Kediri on the Brantas.²⁶³ The Brantas has two main tributaries (in addition to numerous smaller ones, and formerly a large third one) which enclose its delta, the Kali Surabaya or Kali Mas and the Kali Porong.²⁶⁴ According to indigenous accounts the Kali Porong had an artificial origin, having allegedly been dug in the fifteenth century.²⁶⁵ The Brantas delta, with the adjacent lowland of Modjokarto-Pasuruan included, was the largest area with very dense population in Java, more extended even than the coastal plain of Bagelen, although less densely packed than the districts of Tegal and Pekalongan, with villages lying in long, west-to-east running strips alongside former riverbeds.²⁶⁶

As in Sumatra, in Java little kingdoms are known to have been wiped out in a few hours by volcanoes, for instance in 1006 AD, when the city of Dharmavamsa was reduced to ashes by 'a great calamity'—probably an eruption of the Merapi.²⁶⁷ Here too, hydrological instability is most in evidence in alluvial plains. Since the rivers of Java varied greatly in volume in different seasons and carried huge amounts of mud to the sea, highly instable lowland plains are to be found especially on the coasts. The rivers reach their greatest volume between October and May, when the rains are heaviest and torrential downpours cause extensive flooding. A part of the heavy sedimentation load forms a network of levees across the northern plains.²⁶⁸ Particularly in the lower courses of the Solo and the Brantas sedimentation during floods tended to create higher strips of land along the riverbanks.²⁶⁹ Few of the major rivers run a straight course. Meandering is more conspicuous in the Brantas than in any other river in the world, turning towards every point of the compass in its 550 kilometres course. Everywhere, dead riverarms have been created, most of which are covered by sediment and brought under cultivation. There is evidence that hydraulic works and embankments were undertaken in Java from very early times onwards, both for irrigation purposes (canals for sawah cultivation) and water control, e.g. for the diversion of a major river if there was a danger of

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 478, 481; Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, p. 54.

²⁶⁴ Veth, *Java, III*, p. 548.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 553.

²⁶⁷ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 383.

²⁶⁸ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 225; and see Veth, *Java, III*, pp. 150–1, 155, 159.

²⁶⁹ Veth, *Java, III*, p. 158.

flooding.²⁷⁰ The larger rivers of the northcoast all created deltas. And such deltas invariably protruded into the sea, except when they filled in sea-arms, as in the case of the great common delta of the Tanggul Angin and Kali Demak which closed up the sea to the south of the Murya mountain.²⁷¹ The Brantas delta has originally been a landfill, but now protrudes into the sea as well, expanding outward, near Surabaya, at seven meters per year. There are, however, no deltas on Java's southern coast, with its deep sea and strong tide.²⁷² To the contrary, vast amounts of sand were dumped on the southcoast by the sea, making sand dunes predominant on the southern lowland coasts—a feature entirely lacking in the north.

Between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries the hegemonic centres of royal authority were located in the lands of the Brantas river basin in East Java—the last of which was 'pagan' Majapahit.²⁷³ Just prior to this, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, volcanic eruptions in the Opak and Praga basins of Mataram appear to have caused a major population shift from these areas to the eastern parts of the island.²⁷⁴ The territories of Old Mataram with their Shaivite and Buddhist stone temples, in south-central Java, were among the crown-lands of the East-Javanese dynasty, but they were among the less important ones, and the memory of Old Mataram appears to have been receding to the background.²⁷⁵ Up to 1222 the capital of Java was in the region of the modern town of Kadiri on the Brantas river, then for seventy years afterwards, up to 1292, it was at Singhasari, further to the east, a little to the north of modern Malang, where it was still separated by a row of mountains from the Brantas valley, which extends from Kadiri to Janggala at the mouth, or in modern terms from Kadiri to Surabaya.²⁷⁶ For geographic reasons, the capital was then re-established, with the aid of a large Chinese-Mongol army which sailed up the river, at Majapahit, again in the Brantas valley, but neither deeply inland nor on the coast: it was halfway between Kadiri and Surabaya on a site called Trowulan,

²⁷⁰ Veth, *Java*, I, pp. 20, 50; III, pp. 161–2.

²⁷¹ Veth, *Java*, III, p. 84.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

²⁷³ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, p. 207.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 207, 220–1.

²⁷⁶ S. O. Robson, 'Java at the Crossroads,' *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 137 (1981), p. 260.

near Mojokarto.²⁷⁷ Equidistant to Kadiri and Singhasari, Majapahit commanded the biggest river valley in East Java.²⁷⁸ In 1294, its king, after betraying its Mongol allies, proclaimed himself lord of the entire island.²⁷⁹ Majapahit clearly combined the advantages of agrarian and port states: uniting the two traditional 'halves' of the realm, Janggala and Kadiri, it was situated in a wide rice-producing plain and close enough to the ports to control them.²⁸⁰ The result was that Majapahit became a bigger power than any that had ever existed in Java, emphasizing agriculture but also projecting its power far beyond Java, its sailors navigating the length and breadth of the Indian Ocean. It made rice a major export, and turned Javanese ports into entrepôts for spices carried from the Moluccas.²⁸¹ Meanwhile, it was visited by Chinese, Arabs, Parsis, Gujaratis, Bengalis, and many other nations that came to trade in its ports.²⁸² 'And they flourished so greatly', writes Pires, 'that Mohammed and his followers determined to introduce their doctrines in the sea-coasts of Java [together] with merchandise.'²⁸³

Rivers were also a major geographical factor in the formation of the *pasisir* politics centred on the ports of Java's northcoast, especially those of the northeast. This river-mouth and coastal civilization was still by no means entirely Muslim in the fifteenth century, even though the expansion of commerce was beginning to bring it into a closer relationship with Islam in some of the most important places.²⁸⁴ In a large western section of the island, to the west of the Tjimanoeck river, the kingdom of Sunda in the fifteenth century was ruled from Pakuwan by the Hindu dynasty of Pajajaran, independent of Majapahit, and 'averse to admit Muslims for fear they would encroach upon its affairs in the way they did in Java.'²⁸⁵ Generally, the northern ports of Java (including Sunda) were provisioning centres for the maritime trade of the entire archipelago and beyond, where rice, locally grown or obtained from the interior, was supplied, as

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 261; Veth, *Java*, I, pp. 62, 66; *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 38-39.

²⁷⁸ Robson, 'Java at the Crossroads,' p. 262.

²⁷⁹ Veth, *Java*, I, p. 66.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 262-3; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 174.

²⁸² Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 174-80.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

²⁸⁴ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, p. 71.

²⁸⁵ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 167; and see p. 173.

well as other foodstuffs, and pepper.²⁸⁶ And they were becoming more and more important as stapling points for the spice trade of especially the eastern archipelago. This was a trade in the hands of local merchants, who were however related in a variety of ways to the overseas trading groups, as well as to the local nobility and even the royal family.²⁸⁷ The ports were also places where shipdocks and even shipbuilding facilities existed, and where ship owners were concentrated who could invest the considerable capital needed in the maritime trading ventures.²⁸⁸ The typical pattern is that they were relatively small (of a few thousand inhabitants), with some of the bigger ones accessible for junks, and that they were at or near the mouths of navigable rivers reaching inland: Bantam, Pontang, Sunda Kalapa, Cirebon, Japura, Tegal, Semarang, Demak, Tuban, Gresik, Surabaya, Panarukan, and Pajajaran among them.²⁸⁹

To the north of Java and east of Sumatra, the large island of Kalimantan, formerly known as Borneo, has always remained remarkably isolated, largely on account of its geographical conditions, and its fame, paradoxically, has been enhanced in no small measure by the fact that Joseph Conrad immortalized it as one of the still 'forgotten, unknown places of the earth.' There is, in effect, some evidence of an early Chinese interest in the island's birds' nests and pearls and of some Indian penetration of the rivers in the first millennium AD. But the same geographical features, which are similar throughout the various subregions of the island, have persisted throughout history and exemplify what was probably much more common in some other parts of the archipelago half a millennium ago.²⁹⁰ Off the major shipping routes, the compact landmass of Kalimantan was surrounded by shallow seas, shifting bars of sand across the mouths of its rivers, and in the east by an abundance of dangerous off-shore coral reefs.²⁹¹ Almost entirely covered by forests, the island had poor soils and few indigenous agriculturists, an unfavourable climate with

²⁸⁶ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, p. 24.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ Cf. Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 170 ff.

²⁹⁰ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 244; Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, p. 212.

²⁹¹ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, pp. 244–7. For a first-hand account of Kalimantan's dangerous eastcoast, see G. Young, *In Search of Conrad* (London, 1991).

low sunshine, and no minerals.²⁹² The aboriginal peoples of the interior, which were collectively known as 'Dayaks'—mostly hunters-and-gatherers, river fishermen and shifting cultivators, living in 'long houses' or branch leantos—were so scarce that even footpath travel was difficult and most inland movement was dependent on shallow river boats.²⁹³ Conrad's novel *An Outcast of the Islands* evocatively describes how Willems, Captain Lingard's protégé, got caught up in 'the enigmatical solitudes of the gloomy and silent forests' which closed in on the Berau river:

'Here and there he could see the beginnings of chopped-out pathways, and, with the fixed idea of getting out of sight of the busy river, he would land and follow the narrow and winding path, only to find that it led nowhere, ending abruptly in the discouragement of thorny thickets. He would go back slowly, with a bitter sense of unreasonable disappointment and sadness; oppressed by the hot smell of earth, dampness, and decay in that forest which seemed to push him mercilessly back into the glittering sunshine of the river . . . to enter the lonely stretches of sparkling brown water bordered by the dense and silent forest . . . The brown water was there, ready to carry friends or enemies, to nurse love or hate on its submissive and heartless bosom, to help or hinder, to save life or give death; the great and rapid river: a deliverance, a prison, a refuge or a grave.'²⁹⁴

The oral literature of the headhunting Dayaks often concerns itself with accounts of the men who were the first to reach various rivers, migrations along river 'highways,' the clearing of virgin forests for agriculture, the establishment of landing places near longhouses, and the extension of authority over river segments in various parts of the island.²⁹⁵ The rivers often have difficult rapids and these too figure in the stories of early migrations. Burial customs frequently include themes of river voyages. And tribal cosmology assigns an important place to rivers serving as a means of contact with deities of the upper air and the upstream, and with deities, dragons and serpents of the underworld and downstream.²⁹⁶ Reliable historical information hardly

²⁹² Dobby, *Monsoon Asia*, p. 212; Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, pp. 244–5.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ J. Conrad, *An Outcast of the Islands* (Or. 1896; Middlesex, 1975), Preface of 1919, and pp. 225, 61–62, 101, 178.

²⁹⁵ B. Sandin, *The Sea Dayaks of Borneo before the White Rajah Rule* (London, 1967), esp. pp. 1–59.

²⁹⁶ Ch. Healey, 'Tribes and States in "Pre-Colonial" Borneo: Structural Contradictions and the Generation of Piracy,' *Social Analysis*, 18 (1985), p. 11.

exists, and certain rivers of Kalimantan, particularly the Berau, are still relatively unknown.²⁹⁷ The Berau—which had been ‘Sambir’ to Almayer, and ‘Patusan’ to Lord Jim and Marlow—was really the result of the meeting of two rivers which came from the deep, forested interior of Kalimantan, the hill country of the Dayaks: the Segai in the north, and the Kelai, more to the south. After these two rivers meet, they create the Berau, which flows through the tidal flats of delta to the sea. The other river that Captain Lingard discovered was the Bulungan, which was also remote and little known. The entire region between the two rivers was a tangle of mud-blocked waterways, with dangerous coral reefs in its approach from the sea, and the secret passage which had given Lingard unique access to the upstream settlements came to be called ‘Oversteek van Lingard’ or ‘Lingard’s Crossing’ on old Dutch charts.²⁹⁸ Lingard, ‘with infinite trouble’ had found out and surveyed the entrances to ‘his river,’ the river that made him rich.²⁹⁹ The business of the Berau and Bulungan rivers was the rattans, wax, dammar resin, gutta-percha, kayu gahara (aromatic wood) and birds’ nests brought from the Dayak lands and carried to Makassar, Singapore or Palembang. Local rajas in the area, collaborating with Orang Laut or ‘Sea-rovers,’ were constantly at war, conducting slave raids in their war-prahus, but when Lingard made his way here, a new settlement of Malays was forming, and his trade ‘brought prosperity to the young state, and the fear of his heavy hand secured its internal peace for many years . . .’³⁰⁰ Lingard kept his rivers secret for ten years, until he was betrayed by Willems, who sold out to Syed Abdullah, the eldest son of a Strait merchant, and thus ‘brought the Arabs into the river.’³⁰¹

The commercial exploitation of Kalimantan’s rivers in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was probably in essential respects not very different from what went on in the 1880s, when Lingard’s monopoly was broken. Only on the island’s coasts, at river outlets, were found immigrant Malays, Chinese, Arabs, and people from Sumatra, Java and Sulawesi, who were there to trade upstream with the Dayaks of the forest, or brought new agricultural activities. In

²⁹⁷ Young, *Conrad*, esp. pp. 2, 4, 128, 163, 169, 190, 225, 232–93 (‘Rivers’).

²⁹⁸ Young, *Conrad*, pp. 241–2.

²⁹⁹ Conrad, *Outcast*, p. 101.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9 (Preface 1919).

the northern part of the island, the small Malay sultanate of Brunei originated at just such a river-mouth, rice-growing settlement, extending its authority inland along scattered ribbons, its domains consisting not of territory but of rights to tax the inhabitants of a river.³⁰² Kuching was such a river port and market, and Sambas, and Pontiak, on the Kapoeas river. Banjarmasin, the later capital of Kalimantan, was on a distributary of the Barito, and traded in forest products.

To the east of Kalimantan and Java, most of the islands are volcanic, set in very deep seas, and, in spite of the dangers of navigation presented by coral reefs and the many small islands that are hardly above water, sea-routes rather than land- or river-routes become overwhelmingly important here, even for local traffic. In the eastern archipelago, Sulawesi, Bali and Lombok accommodated the vast majority of people. Halmahera, which resembles Sulawesi in its spider-like form, and its offshore islands, the Moluccas, produced cloves and other spices. In the latter regions and, even more, in Irian Jaya, population thins out, and geographical references in the pre-sixteenth-century sources become increasingly rare.

Sulawesi is still large enough to resemble, in some respects, Kalimantan and parts of Sumatra.³⁰³ There is a virtual absence of overland routes linking the four peninsulas stretching out from the mountainous centre. But there were some easy crossings of the peninsulas themselves. Tropical rainforests can be found in all parts of the island. However, in contrast to Kalimantan and Sumatra, most rivers in Sulawesi are not navigable deeply inland and have short courses which are, moreover, broken by waterfalls and gorges.³⁰⁴ The important exceptions were, in South Sulawesi, the Cénrana and Walenaé rivers, and some other rivers, like the Saddang and the Karama, which were navigable in their lower courses and had valleys which could be used for inland travel on foot.³⁰⁵ The shorter rivers were still useful in that they provided harbours for traders and travelers and allowed them to cross the usually quite narrow or swampy coastal plains which were fringed by inundated mangrove

³⁰² D. E. Brown, *Brunei: The Structure and History of a Bornean Malay Sultanate* (Brunei, 1970), pp. 79 ff; Healey, 'Tribes,' p. 16.

³⁰³ Cf. Ch. Pelras, *The Bugis* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 1996), esp. pp. 5-7; Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, pp. 252-4.

³⁰⁴ Pelras, *Bugis*, p. 6; Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 253.

³⁰⁵ Pelras, *Bugis*, p. 6.

forests. There was, thus, a rather rudimentary system of land- and water-routes which could be used to transport the island's forest products like rattans, sandalwood, resins and vegetable poisons, as well as sea-products like tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl and mangrove dyes, and in addition iron, copper ore, and gold dust.³⁰⁶ The maritime route between Malacca and the Moluccas, which went through the Butung and Salayar straits, made South Sulawesi into an important entrepôt, and historically this has been the home of the most active seafaring people of these parts of the Indian Ocean, the Bugis and Makassarese, who were notorious as 'corsairs' and slave raiders.³⁰⁷ But dense settlement was confined to the coast. Inland there was only a wandering population in the isolated valleys and basins, collectively known as Torajas, animists practicing shifting yam cultivation, with large tracts of the country unpopulated, and without the terraced sawah cultivation that has been developed in Java.³⁰⁸

In the political constellation of the Indian Ocean, Irian Jaya represents the easternmost periphery. The first reference to this enormous island is probably to be found in the *Nāgarakertāgama*, the panegyric poem written in fourteenth-century Majapahit.³⁰⁹ Pires called it 'the island Papua' and, while it is unclear who held authority over various parts of the island, it probably was already then an area both dangerous on account of the indigenous disease situation (particularly malaria) and warlike population but also attractive on account of the slaves that could be bought or captured there.³¹⁰ Sedentary agriculture has been rare in Irian Jaya throughout history. In most of the lowlands, the soil is leached and barren. In the southern parts of the island extensive mangrove and swamp lands are found, with sago palms producing a bland and gummy staple crop. Further inland, there were lowland tropical forests and forested foothills, changing into moss forest at higher altitudes with constant cloud cover. It may be doubted that, apart from slaves and the famed

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7; Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 254; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 226–7.

³⁰⁸ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 254.

³⁰⁹ K. W. Galis, 'Geschiedenis,' in: W. C. Lein (ed.), *Nieuw Guinea; De ontwikkeling op economisch, sociaal en cultureel gebied*, in *Nederlands en Australisch Nieuw Guinea, Deel I* ('s-Gravenhage, 1953), p. 6.

³¹⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 222; Galis, 'Geschiedenis', pp. 6, 17; J. Miedeman, *De Kebar 1855–1980* (Dordrecht, 1984); P. Schoorl (ed.), *Besturen in Nederlandsch-Nieuw-Guinea: Ontwikkelingswerk in een periode van politieke onrust* (Leiden, 1996), p. 7.

feathers of Paradise Birds, Irian Jaya exported many forest products in the fifteenth century along its numerous southward-flowing rivers. There do not appear to have been river-mouth kingdoms, engaging in such trade, of the type which was encountered in Sumatra or Kalimantan. Major ports in the estuaries of rivers are nowhere in evidence. There are however agriculturists in some of the fertile river valleys in the central highlands, most importantly in the Baliem.³¹¹ An open plain of 60 to 25 kilometres with a cool climate, the Baliem valley was one of the most densely populated parts of Irian Jaya, isolated by impassable swamps, jungles and mountains from the rest of the archipelago, its culture characterized by bloody tribal wars. How long these people, with their remarkable agricultural and horticultural skills, had been there is not known, but their use of iron tools seems to point at trade connections with the coast at some point in their history.

³¹¹ Schoorl, *Nederlandsch-Nieuw-Guinea*, pp. 73–116; R. Archbold, 'Unknown New Guinea,' *National Geographic* (1941), pp. 315–44.

CHAPTER II

MEDIEVAL CITIES

A major new study of Mediterranean history by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, concludes that 'the Mediterranean has probably been the most durably and densely urbanized region in world history.'¹ Cities such as Athens, Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Marseille, Cordoba, Barcelona, Pisa, Florence, Venice, and a long list of others have been prominent centres of power and civilization, determining the fortunes of Mediterranean people over many centuries and indeed, in some cases, millennia.² Correspondingly, there is a long tradition of Mediterranean historiography that has privileged towns and cities. This tradition runs from H. Pirenne's *Medieval Cities*³ to M. Rostovtzeff's *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*⁴ and *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*,⁵ to S. D. Goitein's *A Mediterranean Society*,⁶ to F. Braudel's *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*.⁷ It is a tradition that tallies with the much broader current of social and economic thought—represented by, among others, Adam Smith, Karl Marx and Max Weber—which has elevated towns and cities generally into a highly distinctive and supremely significant category.⁸ In Braudel's words, cities were 'electric transformers', 'water-sheds of human history,' and the conviction has been widely shared that they have been the 'driving force in not only the industrial, but

¹ Horden and Purcell, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

² *Ibid.*

³ H. Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade* (Princeton, 1925).

⁴ M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 2 Volumes (Or. 1926; 2nd revised ed. Oxford, 1957).

⁵ M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1941).

⁶ S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 5 Volumes (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1967–88).

⁷ F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 Volumes (Or. 1949; London and New York, 1972–73).

⁸ Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, p. 91.

also the preindustrial, world economy.⁹ In all cases, cities have been considered significant as an historical category precisely because they are set apart from the countryside.¹⁰ In the context of the historiography of the medieval Mediterranean and of medieval Europe, the role of cities has, inevitably, been linked to the historiography of capitalism, industrialization and modernity, as also to the debates about the uniqueness of the European development. Debates about the distinctiveness of Mediterranean and European cities revolved around the extent to which such cities were 'islands in a feudal sea' and 'autonomous communities.' In America, urban studies have taken Chicago as the paragon city, and here rural-urban polarity was emphasized to an extreme degree;¹¹ the city was seen as an enclave on the frontier, staking out extensive commercial claims over huge hinterlands in the drive to the West.¹²

But cracks have appeared in the very definition of the city as an historical category.¹³ Attempts to define urban centres by size or on the basis of crude demographic criteria (e.g. ten thousand people or more) are no longer convincing.¹⁴ Nor, it seems, can any particular political, legal, social, or architectural criteria be deployed to establish unambiguously what makes an urban settlement not merely quantitatively but qualitatively different from other types of settlement.¹⁵ The preceding observations on the instability of rivers, changing coastlines, and the pervasiveness of environmental change in the Indian Ocean area have already made it apparent that cities were much less durable here than in the Mediterranean, and that traditions of urbanism were less continuous.¹⁶ A starting point for the

⁹ F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th–18th Century, Volume One: The Structures of Everyday Life, The Limits of the Possible* (New York, 1985), p. 479; Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, p. 91.

¹⁰ See J. Friedmann, 'Cities in Social Transformation,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 4 (1961–1962), p. 88; L. Mumford, *The City in History, Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York, 1961); S. Thrupp, 'The Creativity of Cities: A Review Article,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 4 (1961–1962), pp. 53–64.

¹¹ F. Benet, 'Sociology Uncertain: The Ideology of the Rural-urban Continuum,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 6 (1963–1964), pp. 3, 17–18.

¹² For a recent example of this reinterpretation of the American frontier thesis, see W. Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991).

¹³ See Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, pp. 91–94.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 93–96.

¹⁶ On this issue, see also D. Lombard, 'Pour une histoire des villes du Sud-Est asiatique,' *Annales*, 25, 4 (1970), p. 849.

renewed study of Indian urbanism must be a clear understanding that cities and towns, like all settlements, were physically vulnerable to hydrological instability and other geophysical factors. Recognition of this basic fact will help steer us clear of at least some of the faulty decline theories that have plagued Indian history for long. It may also help us explain the more or less constant re-alignments of urban patterns observable throughout the Indian Ocean over time. The instability of urban centres has meant innumerable urban sites but hardly any of the great cities like those in the Mediterranean, which go back to an ancient past. Indian urbanism was labile, and followed a paradigm that was already established in pre-historic Harappa and Mohenjodaro, the first urban civilization of the Indus and the 'lost' Saraswati river.

Exceptions to this paradigm occur, but they are not common. One that comes to mind is the sacred city of Varanasi, with its magnificent river-front display of temples and stone steps.¹⁷ Here we do have a city with ancient origins, a vestige of Hindu urbanism that by the seventeenth century could still be described as 'a large and very well-built town, the majority of the houses being of brick and cut stone, and more lofty than those of other towns of India . . .'.¹⁸ But the continued existence from ancient times of Varanasi reflects an exceptional situation: it stands on a riverbank which is made of beds of *kankar* or hard clay.¹⁹ *Kankar* is an impure limestone, the nearest approach to rock, found in nodules in the older alluvium of the Indo-Gangetic plains, an area normally made of much softer material. *Kankar* is relatively resistant to erosion and this accounts for the longevity of Varanasi (and also of Patna and Mathura).

Geophysical factors probably explain other important aspects of historical Indian cities, such as why cities were often paid little attention, and why they were mostly casually built from perishable materials. We find residential parts made of mud and bamboo or wood, and with stone or brick used exclusively for fortress walls, temples, mosques, palaces, and mansions for nobles and rich merchants. Medieval accounts present most Indian cities as hugely extended vil-

¹⁷ On this city, see also Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe*, p. 350; and idem, 'Reflections,' p. 94.

¹⁸ Ball and Crooke, *Tavernier*, pp. 96-97.

¹⁹ Arden Wood, 'Rivers and man,' pp. 1-2.

lages. The settled river plains of the Indian Ocean must have provided an overwhelmingly rural spectacle, even where settlements were large. Agro-towns and 'semi-rural cities' (Weber's *Ackerbürgerstädte*) existed in the Mediterranean too,²⁰ and an 'agricultural' sector was present within Mediterranean settlements of every type and size: large open spaces of uncultivated or agricultural land and orchards could be found in even the largest and most crowded of Mediterranean cities, including Rome, Milan and Cairo.²¹ Here too, extensive suburbs and extra-mural sprawl often made the transition from city to countryside a gradual one.²² But in the lands of the Indian Ocean 'agrarian cities' and 'rurban' settlements of all sizes have been the general rule throughout the medieval period.²³

The Khmer city of Angkor, for instance, was at the core of a group of buildings which left ruins over an area of approximately thirty-two by twenty-two kilometres, constituting the most important Indianized site of Cambodia.²⁴ Angkor was the residence of a king with an administration and an army, and it was a commercial and even a spiritual centre; but it was more an agrarian than an urban agglomeration, consisting of a grandiose but precarious collection of hydraulic works and canals which facilitated the cultivation of rice-lands inside the 'city' as well as for kilometres around.²⁵ It was the focal point of an agricultural economy in which the use of money appears to have been minimized, and in its sacred geography it accommodated a hierarchical society in which the Buddhist and Hindu clergy occupied a privileged position—hence the site is strewn with the remnants of temples as well.²⁶ In the same broad region,

²⁰ See M. Weber, *The City* (New York and London, 1958), p. 70; Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, p. 110.

²¹ Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, p. 110.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ The term 'rurban' was introduced by Charles J. Galpin in 1922, and applied to Rajput lineage centres in North India by Richard Fox to underscore the spuriousness of the distinction between 'urban' and 'rural' in this context (see R. G. Fox, 'Rurban Settlements and Rajput "Clans" in Northern India,' in: R. G. Fox (ed.), *Urban India: Society, Space and Image* (Durham, 1970), pp. 167–85). Fox uses the term 'rurban' to indicate 'small urban-like centers associated with kin bodies ("clans") of locally dominant castes in parts of northern India' (p. 171). The same term can be used for even the largest of India's medieval cities.

²⁴ See Lombard, 'Villes du Sud-Est asiatique,' pp. 850–1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 851.

sites contemporary with Angkor, such as Pagan, Sukhothai and Majapahit, and Pakuwan, while less studied, appear to show similar patterns, as do places such as Amarapura, Mandalay, Kartasura, Surakarta, and Yogyakarta, well after the fifteenth century.²⁷ Mercantile centres that arose in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago from the thirteenth and particularly the fifteenth century, like Malacca, were usually sited at river mouths and consisted essentially of unwallled aggregates of villages, the houses of which might be rebuilt in a few days if necessary.²⁸ These centres could be quite large even by European or Chinese standards, and their residents were cosmopolitan in culture and familiar with the use of money, but to visitors from outside they often did not look like cities at all. Even these commercial centres had the appearance of agrarian settlements. Visitors from Europe and China were struck by their greenness, the rural pattern of city life, and the virtual non-existence of a boundary between city and countryside.²⁹ Manpower and fruit-trees were the main assets of such cities.³⁰

In the Indian subcontinent very similar observations have been made almost everywhere until recent times. It should be emphasized that the vast majority of the now 'lost' cities of India have not yet been the object of much study. But the evidence is overwhelming that most Indian cities, especially those of the northern river plains, were sprawling agrarian agglomerations which were both amorphous and ephemeral. This is how Babur (1483–1530), the founder of the Mughal empire, described what he found in Hindustan:

'The cities and provinces of Hindustan are all unpleasant. All cities, all locales are alike. The gardens have no walls, and most places are flat as boards. . . . In Hindustan the destruction and building of villages and hamlets, even of cities, can be accomplished in an instant. Such large cities in which people have lived for years, if they are going to be abandoned, can

²⁷ *Ibid.* About the city of Pakuwan or 'Dayo', the residence of the rulers of Pajajaran in Sunda, which was probably founded in 1433–4, Pires says: 'The city has well-built houses of palm leaf and wood' (*Suma Oriental*, I, p. 168).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 851–4; A. Reid, 'The Structure of Cities in Southeast Asia, Fifteenth to Seventeenth Centuries,' *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 11, 2 (Sept. 1980), pp. 235–50; Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, pp. 87–90. Tuban, exceptionally, as the principal port of Majapahit, appears to have been a town surrounded by a brick wall, while every important house in it had a bricked enclosure (Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 190).

²⁹ Reid, 'Structure of Cities,' pp. 240–1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

be left in a day, even half a day, so that no sign or trace remains. . . . There is no limit to the people. . . . There is no making of houses or raising of walls. They simply make huts from the plentiful straw and innumerable trees, and instantly a village or city is born.'³¹

These are not isolated observations. Ferishta makes the same point: that the depopulation of settlements in India occurs with dazzling speed, complete desolation following in its wake, since houses were normally made of thatch, cattle could be taken along, and domestic utensils of earthenware could be easily replaced.³² Gaur, the capital of Bengal, according to Tomé Pires, had forty thousand inhabitants, all inhabiting 'palm-leaf huts' except the king who lived in a well-built adobe house.³³ Francois Bernier, in the mid-seventeenth century, writes that Delhi, 'the capital of Hindoustan,' was 'not destitute of handsome buildings' but consisted very largely of 'thatched cottages' and, he adds,

'it is because of these wretched mud and thatch houses that I always represent to myself Delhi as a collection of many villages, or as a military encampment with a few more conveniences than are usually found in such places.'³⁴

Only slightly later, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier wrote of Delhi as 'a large town' but broken down since the court had moved to Shahjahanabad, and he observed that even the remaining nobles now lived in tents:

'There are narrow streets and houses of bamboo as in all India, and only three or four nobles of the court reside at Delhi, in large enclosures, in which they have their tents pitched.'³⁵

The same writer made compelling observations about other Indian cities. He describes how the governor of Dhaka [Dacca] also used to live in tents:

'Dacca . . . is a large town. . . . Its length exceeds 2 coss; and from the last brick bridge, which I have mentioned above, up to Dacca, there is a succession of houses. . . . These houses are, properly speaking, only miserable huts made of bamboo, and mud which is spread over them. Those of

³¹ W. M. Thackston (transl.), *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor* (New York, 1996), p. 334.

³² *TF*, II, p. 419.

³³ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 90–91.

³⁴ Bernier, *Travels*, pp. 248, 246.

³⁵ Ball and Crooke, *Tavernier*, p. 78.

Dacca are scarcely better built, and that which is the residence of the Governor is an enclosure of high walls, in the middle of which is a poor house merely built of wood. He ordinarily resides under tents, which he pitches in a large court in this enclosure.³⁶

Burhanpur, a provincial capital in the northern Deccan, was 'a large, much ruined town, the houses of which are for the most part thatched.'³⁷ Sironj was 'a large town, of which the majority of the inhabitants are Banian merchants and artisans, who have dwelt there from father to son, which is the reason why it contains some houses of stone and brick.'³⁸ Patna was

'one of the largest towns in India, and is situated on the margin of the Ganges, on its western side, and is not less than two coss in length. The houses are not better than those in the majority of the other towns of India, and they are nearly all roofed with thatch or bamboo.'³⁹

Masulipatnam 'is a straggling town (village), the houses in which are built of wood, and stand detached from one another.'⁴⁰ Of the famous trading port of Surat, Tavernier says that

'the walls of the city are built of earth, and the houses of private persons are like barns, being constructed of nothing but reeds, covered with cow-dung mixed with clay, to fill the interstices, and to prevent those outside from seeing between the reeds what goes on inside. In the whole of Surat there are only nine or ten well-built houses, and the Shahbandar or chief of the merchants, owns two or three of them.'⁴¹

Tavernier describes Agra as 'the largest town in India' and a beautiful city; but even so, the same city had, in the estimate of Bernier, 'the appearance of a country town, especially when viewed from an eminence.'⁴² Building styles in Agra were clearly mixed. We learn that 'the palaces and gardens take up the greatest part of it . . . [but] the ordinary houses are low, and those of the commoner sort of people are but straw, containing but few people a piece.'⁴³ There

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴² Ball and Crooke, *Tavernier*, p. 86; Bernier, *Travels*, p. 285.

⁴³ Sen, *Thevenot*, p. 49.

were over eight hundred baths in Agra, and many mosques, caravanserais, and tombs.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, Bernier elaborates:

'The prospect it presents is rural, varied, and agreeable; for the grandees having made it a point to plant trees in their gardens and courts for the sake of shade, the mansions of Omrahs, Rajas, and others are all interspersed with luxuriant and green foliage, in the midst of which the lofty stone houses of Banyanes or Gentile merchants have the appearance of old castles buried in forests . . .'⁴⁵

Spacious houses, as in Agra, that were exposed on all sides to the wind, were attractive, although they had to be concealed by high walls in order to prevent the women from being seen.⁴⁶ The thatched cottages of the ordinary people may have been well-suited to the hot climate, and they could be easily built and rebuilt, but their presence made Indian cities subject to frequent conflagrations.⁴⁷

It was not different on the Malabar coast. Here rapid sedimentation of the shore and river flooding had rendered the ports of Cranganore and Eli unusable by 1341, giving increased importance to Cochin, Cannanore, and especially Calicut, the Indian city whose wealth came to surpass that of any other in the medieval European imagination and which was 'ruined by the King of Portugal.'⁴⁸ That Calicut, in the fifteenth century, was in fact one of the busiest trading cities of the world is beyond doubt.⁴⁹ It was not only an important entrepôt and a stopover for merchants from all over the Indian Ocean, and even China, but situated at the very source of pepper production. Contemporary Portuguese writings mention that the city was large, larger even than Lisbon.⁵⁰ Ma Huan, in 1414, calls it 'the great country of the Western Ocean' and devotes almost one-tenth of his book to it.⁵¹ He writes that there were twenty or thirty mosques

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 46–48.

⁴⁵ Bernier, *Travels*, p. 285.

⁴⁶ See Bernier, *Travels*, p. 246; Ball and Crooke, *Tavernier*, p. 86.

⁴⁷ Bernier, *Travels*, p. 246.

⁴⁸ J. Winter Jones (transl.), *The Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema of Bologna from 1502 to 1508* (London, 1928), p. 71.

⁴⁹ See R. M. Eaton, 'Multiple Lenses: Differing Perspectives of Fifteenth-century Calicut,' in: L. Sears (ed.), *Autonomous Histories, Particular Truths: Essays in Honour of John Smail* (Madison, 1993), pp. 71–86.

⁵⁰ W. Brooks Greenlee (transl.), *The Voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral to Brazil and India, From Contemporary Documents and Narratives* (London, 1938), p. 78; Eaton, 'Multiple Lenses,' p. 73.

⁵¹ Mills, *Ma Huan*, pp. 137–46 and s. v.

in the city and a settled Muslim population which constituted the majority of the people.⁵² But Calicut (*Koli Koddai*, the 'fortress of the cock') had no wall around it.⁵³ The city was built on an inhospitable shore and had to rely on neighbouring ports at some distance from the city which itself was without a port.⁵⁴ Varthema observes that the houses of Calicut 'extend for about a mile, built close together, and then the wide houses, that is, the houses separate one from the other, cover a space of about six miles.'⁵⁵ There were 'many empty spaces' in the city, and 'large lakes of water.'⁵⁶ Pepper was grown right within the city.⁵⁷ And about the quality of the houses Varthema has this to say:

'The houses are very poor. The walls are about as high as a man on horse-back, and the greater part are covered with leaves, and without any upper room. The reason is this, that when they dig down four or five spans, water is found, and therefore they cannot build large houses. However, the house of a merchant is worth fifteen or twenty ducats. Those of the common people are worth half a ducat each, or one or two ducats at the most.'⁵⁸

Varthema then had an opportunity to observe the king's palace, which he describes as follows:

'The palace of the king is about a mile in circumference. The walls are low, as I have mentioned above, with very beautiful divisions of wood, with devils carved in relief. The floor of the house is all adorned with cowdung. The said house is worth 200 ducats and thereabouts. I now saw the rea-

⁵² Mills, *Ma Huan*, p. 140. Varthema, almost a century later, says that 'in Calicut there are at least fifteen thousand Moors, who are for the greater part natives of the country' (Winter Jones, *Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema*, p. 61). The latter figure may reflect a sharp drop in the Muslim population of Calicut after the arrival of the Portuguese, but the extent of this remains beyond computation.

⁵³ Winter Jones, *Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema*, p. 55; Brooks Greenlee, *Voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral*, p. 78.

⁵⁴ Winter Jones, *Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema*, p. 55.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Brooks Greenlee, *Voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral*, pp. 78-79.

⁵⁷ Winter Jones, *Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema*, p. 63.

⁵⁸ Winter Jones, *Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema*, p. 55. In the larger houses of merchants, according to Cabral, stone was used, but even these were thatched with palm-leaf (Brooks Greenlee, *Voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral*, p. 78). The more general situation in the cities of Malabar is probably not very different from that in Cochin, as described by Ma Huan: 'As to the houses in which the people live: to construct them they use coconut-trees; and to cover them they use coconut-leaves woven into strips, like thatch, through which the rain cannot leak. Every family uses a store-house built of layers of bricks and mud' (Mills, *Ma Huan*, p. 132).

son why they could not dig foundations, on account of the water, which is close to them.⁵⁹

The instability of Indian cities was enhanced by volatile demographic factors: sharp seasonal fluctuations of the number of their inhabitants, the general mobility of large numbers of people, the long tradition of internal migration caused by military invasions and raids, famines, epidemics and droughts, as well as the general volatility of Indian political and military life.⁶⁰ During some Mongol campaigns vast crowds from the surrounding countryside and towns would congregate within Delhi, trying to get into one of the fortified areas.⁶¹ Instability of the population, and seasonal migration, was also particularly in evidence in the Persian Gulf ports.⁶² Every summer, a great migration to the mainland depopulated Hormuz.⁶³ It was hard to tell how many people lived in Surat, says Thevenot, because of the seasons; there were many all year round, but in the monsoon time, from January to April (when ships could come and go) there were so many that lodgings could hardly be obtained and all the suburbs were full.⁶⁴ Highly peripatetic political elites were instrumental in creating numerous new towns and cities in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the fortunes of these places remained intimately tied to the fortunes of these ruling elites themselves.⁶⁵ If there were about 250 urban or 'rurban' localities in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mughal empire, many of these centres were founded on the initiative of local political rulers, either in Mughal

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶⁰ When Timur was making his way through the Panjab, entire towns would empty out, with people choking the roads and submerging other towns which still provided safety (cf. Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, III, pp. 422, 427, 431). See also Chaudhuri, 'Reflections', p. 92.

⁶¹ *TFS*, pp. 254–5; *TF*, p. 104. When Timur was about to sack Delhi, 'great numbers of Hindus and gabrs, with their wives and children, and goods and valuables had come into the city from all the country around...' (Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, III, p. 445).

⁶² J. Aubin, 'Le royaume d'Ormuz au début du xvi^e siècle', *Mare Luso-Indicum*, II (1973), pp. 151–2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁶⁴ Sen, *Thevenot*, p. 21.

⁶⁵ See, for instance, *TF*, pp. 146, 151, 277, 308, 324, 328, 342; *TF*, II, pp. 13, 98–99, 183, 198, 200, 202, 234, 237, 254, 279, 281, 339; *TFS*, pp. 63, 124–8, 134–7, 148–9, 329; *TMS*, p. 232; *TA*, pp. 191, 209, 210, 255, 491, 530, 642, 639, 655. See also H. C. Verma, *Dynamics of Urban Life in Pre-Mughal India* (Delhi, 1986).

times or in the not so distant past.⁶⁶ Some of the major cities were virtually new creations of the Mughal emperors themselves. Thus Agra was 'no more but a Bourg which had a little Castle of Earth' before it mushroomed under Akbar (1556–1605).⁶⁷ Lahore was not old,

'for before King Humayun [1530–40; 1555–56], it was at best a bourg: that king made a city of it, built a castle, and kept his court there, and it increased so in short time, that with the suburbs it made three leagues in length.'⁶⁸

Firuzabad, Jaunpur, Husainabad, Gulbarga, Bidar, Ahmadabad and numerous other cities were created by Indo-Islamic rulers which preceded the Mughals, and many of these cities had already lost their significance by the early sixteenth century. Even the largest capitals had trouble surviving the frequent relocations of the imperial court.⁶⁹ When the fourteenth-century Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta first saw Delhi, he described it as

'the imperial residence of Delhi, capital of the country of India (*qāʿida bilād al-hind*), a very illustrious city, large, combining beauty and power. It is surrounded by a wall which does not have its equal in the universe. It is the greatest of the cities of India (*mudun al-hind*) and even of all the cities of the Islamic East.'⁷⁰

Shortly afterwards he observed that Delhi was 'entirely abandoned . . . without fire, smoke, or torch . . . immense city that it is . . .

⁶⁶ Cf. Chaudhuri, 'Reflections', pp. 83, 88.

⁶⁷ Sen, *Thevenot*, p. 46. Agra existed as a village for centuries prior to 1499, when Sikandar Lodi decided to make it his capital. Its early history as a city is thus associated with the expansion of Afghan power. The earthquake (*zalzala*) of 1505, which levelled its major buildings and left several thousand dead, is described as the most violent one that had ever occurred (*TF*, pp. 182–3; Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, IV, pp. 446, 450, 465; *TKJ*, pp. 175, 195–7, 209).

⁶⁸ Sen, *Thevenot*, p. 85. In 1421, during the rebellion of Jasrat Shaykh Khokhar, Lahore was deserted; after which it was restored through royal favour (*TMS*, p. 197).

⁶⁹ There was also the practice of kings and dynasties to build entire new suburbs and palace complexes for themselves. Ibn Battuta writes: '... it is common usage in Hind to discard the palace of the king, on his death, with everything in it; people do not touch it, his successor builds himself another palace' (Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Battoutah*, III, pp. 271–2). This practice may well have been motivated by health problems associated with the build-up of mould in old buildings.

⁷⁰ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Battoutah*, III, pp. 145–6.

it was empty, abandoned and its population completely scattered.⁷¹ Battuta's account is perhaps exaggerated, but it does illustrate the devastating consequences of Muhammad bin Tughluq's decision to relocate his capital in the Deccan, in Daulatabad.⁷² Centuries later, the temporary departure of the imperial Mughal court would still have a comparable effect on the city of Delhi. Thevenot reported in 1666 that Delhi 'appears to be a desert when the king is absent.'⁷³ In medieval times Delhi was depopulated on several other occasions, when famine raged.⁷⁴ And it was again destroyed in 1398-9 by Timur.

Still in the eighteenth century, French accounts of India emphasize the general lack of monumentality of Indian cities.⁷⁵ Louis de Féderbe de Modave, in 1776, observes that 'in the cities of India . . . the majority of the houses are merely of earth.'⁷⁶ The architectural splendour of the Mughals and other Muslim dynasties, which consisted largely of forts, palaces, mosques, gardens, and mausoleums, offers a stark contrast to the residential mud architecture which served ordinary people. Monumental Muslim architecture, like its Hindu counterparts, however, served dynastic, imperial, and even religious ambitions, but it is not conceptually linked to the city as such. Rare as it is, it could be fitted into any landscape, whether rural or urban.

Dutch and British servants of the East India Companies sometimes blamed the carelessness, inefficiency, and indolence of Indian officials for the neglect of cities. Thus Francisco Pelsaert regarded the port city of Surat, while immensely wealthy and important and the gateway to Mecca, as an underdeveloped city, threatened by fires

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 315-6.

⁷² Itself a city of wildly fluctuating fortune (cf. *FS*, pp. 227, 439-40, 443, 447; *TF*, pp. 135-6).

⁷³ Sen, *Thevenot*, p. 60; and cf. Ball and Crooke, *Tavernier*, p. 78; other imperial capitals such as Lahore and Agra were similarly affected by the departure of the court (cf. Bernier, *Travels*, p. 384; Sen, *Thevenot*, pp. 49, 85).

⁷⁴ For the history of Delhi and the role of various rulers in the creation of its 'suburbs' and major buildings, see *TFS*, pp. 176, 302, 326, 341, 459, 473-4, 481-2, 484-7; *TF*, pp. 89, 112, 136-7, 159, 161; *FS*, pp. 294, 431-6, 438; *KF*, pp. 12, 23-30; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 145-53, 341-2; and below, Chapter IV.

⁷⁵ G. Deleury, *Les Indes Florissantes: Anthologie des Voyageurs Français (1750-1820)* (Paris, 1991), p. 473.

⁷⁶ '... dans les villes des Indes . . . la plupart des maisons ne sont que de terre' (*ibid.*, p. 135).

and by the sedimentation of its harbour which its corrupt officials chose to ignore.⁷⁷ Surat hardly had any permanent infrastructure, not even a marketplace. It had unpaved streets and there were no considerable public buildings within the precincts of the city.⁷⁸ Even in the seventeenth century, it had only the flimsiest defence works, with earthen walls. There was a fortress, but it was a poor one, and no-one thought that a determined invader would be unable to take it.⁷⁹ In the estimate of Richard Burton, most cities in the area were similarly furnished. Thus Hyderabad, in Sind, 'like most native capitals in this part of Asia, consists of a huge mass of huts and houses, bazaars, and mosques, with a fort or citadel of formidable appearance, but of no real value . . .'⁸⁰ All provincial capitals, in fact, lacked an urban regime that could have guaranteed their survival in a time of crisis.

It can be concluded, then, that the city had little or no autonomy in the historical Indian Ocean region. And however one may wish to evaluate the Mediterranean and European city and its historical role, the Indian city as such was certainly not the privileged locus of sustained and cumulative social change. The medieval chronicles of India preserved a record of events that have occurred in particular cities, but there are no surviving civic records of any nature in any of them. In India, as in all other parts of the Indian Ocean area, we encounter 'labile rurbanism' from the earliest times, a form of city life that was relatively undifferentiated from the agrarian order and precarious in nature. In some places, such as Ethiopia, we even encounter a medieval civilization that was entirely without urbanism of any kind, with elite positions rurally dispersed; the Ethiopians of the state which succeeded Aksum did not have cities or houses at all since they lived in tents and in cottages.⁸¹ Elsewhere on the East-African coast historical sources show that settlements of considerable size, not uncommonly on off-shore islands, had developed by the

⁷⁷ See J. C. Heesterman, 'Littoral et Intérieur de L'Inde', in: L. Blussé, H. L. Wesseling and G. D. Winus (eds), *History and Underdevelopment: Essays on Underdevelopment and European Expansion in Asia and Africa* (Leiden, 1980), pp. 87-92.

⁷⁸ Sen, *Thevenot*, p. 23.

⁷⁹ Heesterman, 'Littoral et Intérieur', p. 89; Ball and Crooke, *Tavernier*, p. 6.

⁸⁰ Burton, *Sindh*, p. 6.

⁸¹ F. C. Gamst, 'Peasantries and Elites without Urbanism: The Civilization of Ethiopia,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 12 (1970), pp. 373-92.

middle of the second millennium AD.⁸² Places such as Mogadishu and Kilwa have been described as beautiful, well-constructed and walled cities by fourteenth- and fifteenth-century travelers from the Muslim world and Europe, with populations reaching as much as 12,000.⁸³ Archaeologists, however, have pointed out that many of these Swahili settlements of the first half of the second millennium had to be abandoned, sometimes prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, due to the unreliability of the water supply.⁸⁴ In the Lamu archipelago, for instance, the best fresh water would be found in wells closest to the sea, where it floats on the heavier, salt water, but over time this supply would become salty and unusable too, especially if the wells were made too deep.⁸⁵ In addition, deteriorating soil fertility and a range of tropical diseases may have played a role, as well as the vulnerability of these cities to attacks from the interior. In recent decades, archaeologists of the East-African coast, instead of exclusively concentrating on the highly visible stone ruins of mosques, tombs and large dwellings, have also become much more aware of the fact that the houses of the bulk of the inhabitants of the settlements were made of mud, wood and thatch or mud-and-wattle, and that building in stone became more common only gradually when a class of wealthy urbanites arose who reserved for themselves the right to build in stone, making use of what has been called 'house power'.⁸⁶ The ratio of stone buildings to buildings of less durable materials varied from place to place and over time, but generally the mud buildings must have been much more common.

Cities definitely increased in size and number under Islam in the medieval period, but their character remained the same. By Akbar's time we are presented with long lists of cities and *qasbas* in northern India. The Indo-Islamic cities were the sites of political and military power, apart from being commercial centres.⁸⁷ But even so, they were essentially not recognized as legal entities in any way, and

⁸² G. Connah, *African Civilizations: Precolonial cities and states in tropical Africa: an archaeological perspective* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 151.

⁸³ Brooks Greenlee, *Voyages of Pedro Alvares Cabral*, p. 68; Connah, *African Civilizations*, pp. 150–1.

⁸⁴ Connah, *African Civilizations*, p. 157.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 160–175.

⁸⁷ Cf. Chaudhuri, 'Reflections', p. 83; R. S. Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton, 1991), pp. 228–54.

the inhabitants of cities and towns enjoyed no special privileges.⁸⁸ In India, Islamic cities always continued to include large numbers of non-Muslims. Beyond the construction of mosques and other Islamic buildings in a predominantly Hindu city the ruling elite made no political distinction in the government of city and country.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Chaudhuri, 'Reflections', pp. 83–84; Humphreys, *Islamic History*, p. 231.

⁸⁹ Chaudhuri, 'Reflections', pp. 84–94.

CHAPTER III

FRONTIER AND SETTLED SOCIETY

To find the sources of social change is far from easy, particularly because social change and innovation in the medieval context were generally regarded as illegitimate. Rather than being valued as a positive force, it was routinely dismissed as disturbing. The intellectual apparatus for evaluating change by understanding its possibilities and uses was lacking; change meant lawlessness and the only terms in which it could be conceptualized were those of heresy, immorality, sedition and treason.¹ Change could only occur surreptitiously, in the margins of the political system and to the extent that the political authorities overlooked or failed to check it.²

In a geographic perspective, we associate the sources of social change, above all, with the habitats of the frontier of settled society. The major sources of change affecting the settled agrarian societies of the river plains and delta lands surrounding the Indian Ocean, therefore, can be found not in urban institutions but in the desert and arid zone, and in the maritime world of the Indian Ocean itself. Medieval Indian history is not the story of how urban life gradually subverted the feudal order, but the story of how the rich production areas of the agricultural river plains were affected by the movements of nomadic and seafaring people. It is about how people from the desert and the sea increased their hold over settled people, and how they did this by inserting themselves in the interstitial areas of the settled society, or at river outlets and on the littoral.

The resulting medieval synthesis was a fusion of two types of society. One was the society of the frontier, of mobile wealth, of nomadism, of raiding and long-distance trade (both overland and maritime), and of precious metals—the essence of mobile wealth. The other was the

¹ For a brief analysis of this problem in medieval Europe, see N. Rosenberg and L. E. Birdzell, Jr., *How the West Grew Rich: The Economic Transformation of the Industrial World* (New York, 1986), p. 96; for the Islamic Middle East, cf. M. Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, 1994).

² Rosenberg and Birdzell, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

settled society of the river plains, characterized by intensive agriculture, high population density, relative immobility, and a failing production of precious metals. The nomadic and maritime worlds were alike in that both fostered movement and change. They generated the forces of rationalization, and of commercialization and monetization. Because of their potential for resource mobilization, both were fields of economic growth. But both were intractably resistant to the medieval principles of political control at work in settled society.

THE NOMADIC FRONTIER

The inhabitants of the arid zone, nomads and pastoralists more generally, cannot be too sharply distinguished from the scattered forest populations that practiced hunting and gathering or various forms of shifting cultivation, while moving from place to place. Historically, however, forests are silent.

We know almost nothing of the people who lived in the interiors of Sumatra, Kalimantan and the other large islands of the Indonesian archipelago, as also of Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia and Thailand—areas which continued to be characterized until fairly recent times by mountainous and densely forested areas enclosing cultivable river plains or valleys. By the eighteenth century these eastern landmasses of the Indian Ocean were still associated with equatorial rainforest to such an overwhelming degree that the Anglo-Indian word *jungle* often acquired the unhealthy connotations of the marshy jungles of the 'East Indies,' typically of Sumatra and Kalimantan.³ Dense, wet forests have historically remained important in the Indian subcontinent as well, in the eastern parts and in the south-west peninsula, and in coastal Sri Lanka—areas, which, like Indonesia, belonged to the humid tropics. These, too, generally had unhealthy connotations of fevers and parasites.⁴ There were also lands with a more open vegetation cover, including sparse forests, the thick and impervious growths of guz, babool trees and brushwood in dry riverbeds which were the haunts of wild animals, and savannas,

³ See F. Zimmermann, *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meats: An Ecological Theme in Hindu Medicine* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1987), esp. pp. 4, 15–16, 36, 44.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. viii, 4.

pseudo-steppes, and wooded lands which in one way or another had been put to human usage (e.g. elephant forests, timberlands, royal hunting grounds, paradises for tame animals, or hermitages for studying the Veda and for sacrifices to Soma).⁵ Over time, the area of the Indian subcontinent which was covered by either tropical rain-forest or other types of wild forest and *jungle* was gradually reduced to relatively small proportions.⁶ Archaeologists have been able to infer a progressive clearing of the forests, starting in the Doab and continuing eastward.⁷ There were also, at all times, periodic retreats of the sown.⁸ Just as cities could vanish, and trade routes could be abandoned, agricultural lands could become covered with forest again.⁹ Great famines occurred, after which lands would lay fallow, revert to jungle, if they were not occupied by pastoralists, either permanently or until they were settled again.¹⁰ Nevertheless, in contrast with large parts of Malaysia, Sumatra, Kalimantan, or Irian Jaya, in the Indian subcontinent as a whole, the clearing of the land and the retreat of the forest was an ecological process sustained over thousands of years. It reduced forest peoples and shifting cultivators to a status of marginality in a predominantly settled agricultural society.¹¹ By the end of the fifteenth century, to be sure, large tracts even of the Gangetic plain still remained under forest.¹² But in the medieval Indo-Persian chronicles, forests represent the wilderness beyond the reach of the Sultans' cavalries, particularly during the rainy season. Thick forests are, on occasion, mentioned in the Vindhyadri, Sahyadri, Satpura and Satmala ranges of Central India, in the western Ghats, the Konkan, in the foothills of the Himalayas and Karakorum, in Gondwana, and even near Delhi.¹³ Some of these

⁵ These were the *jāṅgala* in the original sense of the word (Cf. Zimmermann, *ibid.*, pp. 44, 50; Pottinger, *Travels*, pp. 10–11, 13, 40, 134).

⁶ Cf. *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 170, 261–2, 294–5; II, pp. 252, 255.

⁷ Zimmermann, *The Jungle*, p. 45.

⁸ S. Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1200–1991* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 37.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48; and see Chapter IV, pp. 166–9.

¹¹ Cf. Zimmermann, *The Jungle*, p. 45; Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity*, esp. pp. 2, 21–22, 26–27, 40, 64, 80–81.

¹² *Al-Hind*, I, p. 295.

¹³ Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity*, pp. 80–81; *FS*, pp. 216–18, 293, 419–20, 447–9; *KF*, p. 75; *TFS*, pp. 473, 478, 481, 511; Defrénery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah, III*, pp. 325–8, 389; *TF*, pp. 135, 147–9, 195, 298, 334–5, 349–59; *TF*, II, pp. 281, 419; *TA*, pp. 87, 557; Siddiqi, *Fourteenth Century Arab Account*, p. 29.

were 'so dark that [in them] day and night were indistinguishable.'¹⁴ They harboured predatory aboriginals, and could provide shelter to bandits, rebels, fugitives, and absconding peasants. But since the air and water of these places were poisonous to all but the 'demonic' forest tribes, people from the plains were warned by their physicians to avoid them.¹⁵ Their history is mostly unknown, and forest people did not have a massive impact on the peasant societies of the plains.

Of vastly greater historical significance than the people of the shrinking forest realm were the pastoral nomads inhabiting the deserts, steppes and other lands characterized by aridity. The Indian subcontinent is positioned at the southeastern end of the ecological continuum of an arid zone which extends—with many interruptions and irregularly—from the Atlantic coast and the Sahara, across Suez, to Arabia, the Levant and Iran, and northwards to Central Asia, Mongolia and parts of China.¹⁶ Everywhere, this 'Saharasian' arid zone receives less than 1,000 mm of rain per year. It includes vast swaths of territory that should be called semi-arid and were suitable for agriculture, including mountainous zones, but which fall into the same category as the properly arid zone in terms of their relevance for stockbreeding and pastoralism.¹⁷ Geographically, the Indian subcontinent straddles the divide between this arid zone and the humid, equatorial parts of the Indian Ocean where intensive agriculture (especially rice) predominated in river plains and deltas enclosed by rainforest. By the conventional definition used above, nearly half of the Indian subcontinent is arid or semi-arid.¹⁸ From the alkaline

¹⁴ *FS*, pp. 216–18.

¹⁵ *TF*, II, p. 298.

¹⁶ Cf. *Al-Hind*, II, esp. pp. 381–4; M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, 3 Volumes* (Chicago, 1974), II, p. 71; X. de Planhol, *Le monde islamique: essai de géographie religieuse* (Paris, 1957); J. J. L. Gommans, 'The Silent Frontier of South Asia, c. A.D. 1000–1800', *Journal of World History*, 9, 1 (1998), pp. 1–23; idem, 'The Eurasian Frontier After the First Millennium A.D.: Reflections Along the Fringe of Time and Space', *The Medieval History Journal*, 1, 1 (1998), pp. 125–43; D. Ludden, 'History outside Civilisation and the Mobility of South Asia', *South Asia*, XVII, 1 (1994), p. 14.

¹⁷ Gommans, 'Silent Frontier', pp. 4–5, note 7.

¹⁸ The other half may reach very high humidity levels in places such as the Konkan and Kerala, with an annual rainfall of up to 450 cms per year, and up to 1,000 cms in the hilly northeastern corner of the subcontinent, while major parts of northern, central and eastern India, along with Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, receive between 100 and 200 cms of rain per year. See R. A. Bryson and D. A. Baerreis, 'Possibilities of major climatic modification and their implications: Northwest

wastelands of Makran, Baluchistan, Sind, Rajasthan and the Thar desert, the arid zone extends into an eastern and a southern direction.¹⁹ Eastwards it runs up to the southern banks of the Ganges near Varanasi; southwards, across the Aravalli mountains into Malwa, then down the lee side of the western Ghats into the Deccan plateau, and further into the southeastern direction of Rayalsima, Kurnool and Cuddapah, and towards the southwest, to the Mysore plateau, to end in northern Sri Lanka.²⁰ Over time, the arid zone appears to have expanded. A not inconsiderable portion of arid lands in India is, in fact, of medieval origin. Desiccation, at this time, could be the result of changes in the patterns of the monsoon, as occurred in the Thar desert and in the Multan area.²¹ Possibly for similar reasons, large parts of Makran and Baluchistan have been more fertile and densely populated in the early medieval period than they are now.²² And what was formerly known as the 'Great Indian Desert' or 'Rajasthan Desert,' the area between Delhi and Karachi and between the Rann of Cutch and the Himalayan foothills, including the Thar, has also become more hostile to human occupation due to increased aridity.²³ Archaeological exploration of desiccated river valleys of northwestern Rajasthan shows a river system that once reached the sea, either independently or as a tributary of the Indus.²⁴ After the seventh or eighth century AD, the decay of the flourishing Rajmahal sites coincided with the spread of pastoral nomadism (as the remains of campsites indicate), and with the occurrence of many dust storms in south-western Rajasthan.²⁵ Here climatic modification and the deterioration of the soil went hand in hand with the cutting down and burning of forests by man.²⁶ By 1000 AD a considerable expansion of the desert had thus occurred, and in later times

India, a case for study', *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society*, 48, 3 (1967), pp. 136-42; Mate, *Water Management*, pp. 5-7.

¹⁹ Gommans, 'Silent Frontier', p. 6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Cf. Chapter I, p. 13.

²² Cf. *Al-Hind*, I, p. 140; Masson writes: 'That... [Baluchistan] has been formerly much more populous can hardly be doubted, when we descry the sites of many cities, which have not now representatives' (*Narrative of Various Journeys*, IV, p. 386).

²³ Bryson and Baerreis, 'Major Climatic Modification', pp. 138-41.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

the advance of the desert into the arable lands may have averaged 400 to 800 meters per year.²⁷ To what extent other parts of the sub-continent were desiccated in the relatively recent past is not easy to make out. But we do know that wide areas of the Deccan became savanna with secondary shrubbery on soil that had been exposed to overgrazing by goats, whereas many other parts suffered decline from the calamitous drought and consequent Durga Devi famine between 1396 and 1407.²⁸ There is also evidence that the Telangana plateau of Andhra Pradesh—now a region of cattle herders—accommodated more agriculture in the past.²⁹

It is in the deserts of Makran and Baluchistan, and in the Thar desert, that rainfall is now less than 10 cm per year, and this is the lowest level registered in any part of India.³⁰ Makran and Baluchistan are an extension of the Great Desert of Persia, and although they had some agriculture in places such as the Kij valley and Buleda, the first British explorer to penetrate these regions, Henry Pottinger, describes an itinerary that went mostly through 'bare plains', 'stony bare hills', 'rugged and stupendous mountains', 'deserts of red sand', 'gravelly desert', 'hard black gravel without a trace of verdure', and other types of inhospitable terrain, sparsely inhabited if at all, and, according to Charles Masson, entirely without 'the magnificent vestiges of the older times, which are to be found in Afghanistan and Persia.'³¹ Baluchistan was a land of great scarcity, where wells of up to fifty metres deep produced brackish and barely palatable water, and where the largely pastoral population suffered the distress of floating particles of sand (Baluchistan's luminous 'moving sands'), and the scorching desert wind which is named *Julot*, 'the flame', or *Badé Sumum*, 'the pestilential wind', that during the hot months from June to September was a life-annihilating threat to men, camels and plants alike and that would strike without warning.³² Remarkably, in some parts of these areas of extreme aridity, rain could come in torrents

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 140–1.

²⁸ Cf. G. D. Sontheimer, *Pastoral Deities in Western India* (New York, 1989), pp. 8, 153.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Cf. Mate, *Water Management*, pp. 5–7; Bryson and Baerreis, 'Major Climatic Modification', p. 136.

³¹ Pottinger, *Travels*, pp. 128, 131, 135, 138; Masson, *Narrative of Various Journeys*, IV, p. 386.

³² Pottinger, *Travels*, pp. 131–7.

during violent thunder storms lasting one or two hours. Pottinger writes that 'the rain fell in the largest drops I ever remember to have seen, and the air was so completely darkened that I was absolutely unable to discern any thing at the distance of even five yards . . .'³³ Such sudden rains commonly caused floods which were regarded as exceedingly dangerous. Pottinger saw 'a limpid brook four or five inches deep swell in the course of ten minutes to a rapid and impassable torrent, carrying everything before it.'³⁴

Slightly to the north of Baluchistan, the Bolan pass is the direct line of communication between Sind and Kandahar and Khurasan. It is the easiest and most level of the many passes intersecting the great chain of mountains (apart from the Mulloh pass, far to the south) and it also constitutes the boundary between the Sard Sel and the Garm Sel, or the hot and the cold countries.³⁵ The local tribesmen here held to the view 'that all below the pass is Hind, and that all above it is Khurasan.'³⁶ The pass, in effect, not merely separates very different ethnic groups with various dialects from each other, but marks a complete change of climate and vegetation, with the *ākh* or milky euphorbia overlooking the frontier of the desert belt which, apparently, it cannot cross.³⁷ Much to the south of the Bolan pass, near Qusdār, the low hills beyond Baghwana have been considered the limit between Hind and Khurasan, with the climate and vegetables of Baghwana corresponding to those of the latter region.³⁸ Further to the north of the Bolan pass, east and south of Ghazna, one fourteenth-century Arab account identifies a 'desolate area of twenty days journey . . . extending over barren hills, defiles and valleys.'³⁹ Foreign travelers generally became confused here. Even Ibn Battuta appears to have been unable to reconstruct his itinerary after Kabul and Karmāsh (which was probably in the Khyber pass) in reliable detail. The Moroccan traveler writes that he, accompanied by 4000 horsemen,

³³ Pottinger, *Travels*, pp. 135–6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 128, note.

³⁵ Masson, *Narrative of Various Journeys*, I, pp. 338–9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Masson, *Narrative of Various Journeys*, II, pp. 45–46.

³⁹ Siddiqi, *Fourteenth Century Arab Account*, p. 32.

‘entered a great desert, which extends fifteen days march . . . [and in which] blows the poisonous and deadly wind . . . the same that also blows in the desert between Hormuz and Shiraz . . . [But] we arrived safely at the Indus [Sind] river.’⁴⁰

He writes that he then turned southward to Sīwistān, ‘a big city, surrounded by a salt desert where one finds no other tree than the *umm ghīlān* [a species of acacia].’⁴¹ More deserts were awaiting him in Sind, a country that was a level plain, with a river fertilizing each bank to a certain distance, after which the earth turns into the sand dunes of the Thar on one side and into the rocky uplands and barren mountains of Baluchistan on the other.⁴² Mongol troops defeated on the banks of the Indus would often get scattered in these deserts, ‘where thirst and hot winds would put an end to their miserable lives.’⁴³

The Thar or Great Indian Desert spreads out into the parts of Rajasthan that lie to the northwest of the Aravalli mountains and that are mostly sandy, barren plains, whereas the country to the southeast of these mountains is more fertile and capable of two crops per year.⁴⁴ The vast northwestern territories have but one river, the Loni, rising in the Pushkar valley and terminating in the Rann of Cutch. They are poorly watered throughout, and very hot, capable of producing one crop per year at most, and dependent on the raising of camels, cattle and sheep in the barren parts.⁴⁵ Here too rains could ‘set in with great violence.’⁴⁶ In contrast with the African desert at the same latitudes, water is at a great distance from the surface throughout the Indian desert, sometimes as much as 100 meters, and in many places well-water is too salty and bitter for drinking purposes.⁴⁷ This is particularly the case in the region of ‘the mysterious city of Bikaner, where the wells are four hundred feet deep and lined throughout with camelbone.’⁴⁸ Bikaner consists almost entirely of shifting sandbanks, from 7 to 30 metres high, and was

⁴⁰ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 91.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴² Cf. *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 144–6; Pottinger, *Travels*, p. 380.

⁴³ *TF*, p. 116.

⁴⁴ J. E. Scott, *In Famine Land: Observations and Experiences in India during the Great Drought of 1899–1900* (New York and London, 1904), p. 67.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴⁶ *TF*, p. 147.

⁴⁷ Scott, *Famine Land*, p. 143.

⁴⁸ R. Kipling, *Kim* (Or. 1901; London, 1994), p. 159.

particularly famine-prone. During droughts most of the wells go dry or, as the expression goes, become 'blind', and, in the absence of rainwater, people would not only die of hunger but also of lack of water.⁴⁹ The region was in the hands of pastoral Jats, but conquered by the Rathor Rajputs in 1459 AD, under Bika, the sixth son of Jodh Rao, the founder of Jodhpur, who named the newly established desert capital after himself.⁵⁰ Amidst the sand, in good years, during and after the rains, grass grows in abundance, so that Bikanir had excellent pasture land and became famous for its horses, camels, cattle, and buffaloes. Ferishta observed that the entire desert region from Bikanir to Jaisalmer and further south to Umarkot and Cutch was very deficient in water and hence had little agriculture but depended largely on the breeding of horses and camels.⁵¹ Cutch and Kathiawar produced some of the finest horses in India, which were crossed with Arabian imports.⁵² On the other hand, in Ferishta's estimate, no other desert, however fearful, could compare with the salt-banks of the Great Rann of Cutch, near the ocean's shore; here nothing would grow at all and 'no bird laid an egg, nor flapped its wings.'⁵³ Armies were brought to doom here by treacherous guides.⁵⁴ The inhabitants of Cutch, in the second half of the fifteenth century, were predatory 'men of the desert, who knew only the sky, earth, water and fire,' and were as yet uninstructed in Islam.⁵⁵

From these northwestern deserts, the arid zone runs eastward, parallel to the great rivers, narrowing down along the southern banks of the Ganges, until, near Varanasi, it reaches the more humid eastern lands which culminated in marshlands and which, in the normative ecology of ancient medical treatises, have been described as the polar opposite of the Aryanized arid northwest, as inferior and unhealthy.⁵⁶ Southward, the arid zone runs into Malwa and towards the western Deccan and the interior of the Desh, where the most arid parts have less than 500 mm of rainfall and are an entirely

⁴⁹ Scott, *Famine Land*, p. 143.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁵¹ *TF*, II, p. 420.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *TF*, pp. 207-13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *TF*, II, pp. 198-9.

⁵⁶ Cf. Gommans, 'Silent Frontier', p. 6; Zimmermann, *The Jungle*, pp. viii, 36, 94.

pastoral habitat.⁵⁷ Much of the Deccan had become savanna-like, with soils that were exposed to overgrazing by goats. Some rivers in the Deccan dry up for six months per year, but there were rivers in Malwa and the Deccan which allowed the spread of extensive forms of sedentary agriculture, characteristically of crops such as sorghum and millets rather than rice, and in the dry seasons provided good pasturage for pastoralists, as well as meeting places for pastoralists, peasants and traders. Where there were no rivers available for irrigation, canals, wells, reservoirs and tanks for rainwater would be used.⁵⁸ Such waterworks were undertaken over many centuries, and many have been excavated which go back to medieval times, in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and in other parts of the Deccan, while in Sri Lanka they go back to ancient times.⁵⁹

Following the arid zone further to the southeast, we reach the Telangana plateau, extending from Golkonda to the Tungabhadra and Krishna rivers and then into Kurnool, Anantapur, Cuddapah, and Chittoor, with a landscape of mostly barren hills and reddish-brown plains dotted with isolated clusters of bushes occupied by cattle herders.⁶⁰ These areas are separated from the fertile, rice-growing coastal deltas by the eastern Ghats. Anantapur, Kurnool and Cuddapah combined with the Ballari district of Karnataka into an area known as the 'Rayalsima' (i.e. 'frontier of the kingdom') and, together with the Rai Doab, is the most arid region of the Deccan, with between 500 and 700 mm of rainfall annually.⁶¹ To the south and southeast of Rayalsima, rainfall increases somewhat, but still remains under 1,000 mm per year, until we reach the more humid Coromandel coast. To the southwest, the table-land of Mysore, with its extremely uneven surface, still belongs to the arid zone, and from there several outliers extend into the extreme southern part of the subcontinent and into northern Sri Lanka. In Mysore, ricelands irrigated by tank or other artificial means for tapping the Kaveri and other rivers

⁵⁷ Gommans, 'Silent Frontier,' p. 6.

⁵⁸ Mate, *Water Management*, esp. pp. 2, 12–15, 33, 35, 45–49, 53–54, 65, 104, 116–18, 143; N. Sengupta, *User-Friendly Irrigation Designs* (New Delhi, 1993).

⁵⁹ Mate, *Water Management*, pp. 12, 15, 33–35, 45–47, 49–51, 54, 65, 143; *TFSA*, pp. 124–5; I. M. Siddiqi, 'Water Works and Irrigation System in India during Pre-Mughal Times', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, XXIX, 1 (1986), pp. 74–75; *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 359–60.

⁶⁰ Sontheimer, *Pastoral Deities*, p. 8.

⁶¹ Sontheimer, *Pastoral Deities*, p. 8; Gommans, 'Silent Frontier', p. 6.

existed within surroundings that, as Cornwallis observed, 'appeared to be condemned to nearly perennial sterility.'⁶²

In contrast to forests and swamps, the arid zone was a relatively healthy place to live, at least under normal circumstances. To the extent that diseases such as cholera, smallpox and plague were infectious or 'crowd' diseases, i.e. needed dense human populations for their survival and transmission, the thinly peopled deserts, savannas, mountains, and steppes, like the sea, had a quarantining effect.⁶³ Paradoxically, they often also had a connecting function. In the Afghan borderlands, pastoral nomads known as *powindas* have for many centuries been involved in the caravan trade between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia and Iran. They could assume this role because the caravan routes coincided with the routes of their pastoral migrations. These nomads rented out camels, drove flocks, guarded caravans, and engaged in trade themselves, particularly in the trade in horses—a crucial commodity on the Indian markets.⁶⁴ Unsited for settled agriculture, the rich grazing lands of the arid zone stimulated the mobility of people and animals. Large armies and caravans moving about in the Indian subcontinent always had to stay close to the nutritious marches and supply lines of the arid zone.⁶⁵ Banjāras and other nomadic caravaners (*kārwanīyān*) dealing in grain and salt made their appearance in the late twelfth century, when they became important in military campaigning, and later came to dominate overland conveyance everywhere in the subcontinent. These nomads possessed vast herds of bullocks and covered thousands of kilometres, following the arid zone pasture lands, where they themselves were involved in stockbreeding.⁶⁶ In the Deccan, the connections between the nuclear agricultural regions—those in the Godavari basin in the north, Andhra Pradesh and the area around Sholapur in the east, Karnataka in the south, and the rice-growing region of the Mavla and the Konkan in the west—were maintained by pastoral groups such as the Vīra Bananjas and their successors,

⁶² Mate, *Water Management*, pp. 116–7.

⁶³ D. Arnold, 'The Indian Ocean as a Disease Zone, 1500–1950', *South Asia*, XIV, 2 (1991), p. 4.

⁶⁴ A. Wink, 'India and the Turko-Mongol Frontier', in: A. M. Khazanov and A. Wink (eds), *Nomads in the Sedentary World* (London, 2001), p. 205.

⁶⁵ Gommans, 'Silent Frontier', p. 8.

⁶⁶ Wink, 'Turko-Mongol Frontier', p. 203; *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 142–3.

which included the Banjāras from the north but also others originating in the Deccan, such as Lingayat merchants and groups such as the Lamanis, Lambadis, Brinjaris, and so on.⁶⁷ A Banjāra legend maintains that the great Durga Devi famine was named for a Banjāri woman—indicating perhaps that the Banjāras continued to be transporters of grain even during this famine.⁶⁸

Everywhere, the arid lands were a highly militarized zone, where *bedari* or 'vigilance' was required. Their inhabitants, having little to live on, and being highly mobile, were prone to predation if they could not be turned into *naukarān* or 'servants' of the king.⁶⁹ The Afridi and Shinwari Afghans of the Khyber pass, through which the road heads from Peshawar to Jalalabad, were among the most infamous on account of the ferocity with which they attacked and robbed caravans, although they were small in numbers.⁷⁰ The Baluchis, too, were notorious for their predatory ferocity, while engaging, under the leadership of their chiefs, in their *Chupao* raids, and they were always in a state of warfare with their neighbours.⁷¹ Murder and robbery and other problems affecting the safety of the trade routes were a recurrent feature everywhere in the arid zone, in places such as Gujarat, Khandesh and the Deccan as well.⁷²

The arid zone generally was the habitat of a thinly spread pastoral and nomadic population, and what made stockbreeding, especially of oxen and horses, feasible here was mainly the supply of nutritious grasses and fodder crops, in addition to the stalk and leaf of dry millet.⁷³ Pastoralists could survive on the products of camels and goats in the driest places and during spells of exceptional drought. Over the long term, however, the feasibility of stockbreeding in the arid zone was conditioned by the moisture regime. There should be neither too little nor too much moisture. Even in many parts of Baluchistan there was the persistent fear among pastoralists that too much rain would fall and cause disease amongst their flocks.⁷⁴ And,

⁶⁷ Sontheimer, 'Pastoral Deities', p. 153.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 153–4.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 155–7, 161–9; II, pp. 218–23, 231–2, 237–9, 255–6.

⁷⁰ Masson, *Narrative of Various Journeys*, I, pp. 147, 162–3.

⁷¹ Pottinger, *Travels*, pp. 26, 58–59.

⁷² Cf. S. R. Moosvi, 'The Gujarat Ports and their Hinterland', in: Indu Banga (ed.), *Ports and their Hinterland in India, 1700–1950* (New Delhi, 1992), pp. 123, 125.

⁷³ Gommans, 'Silent Frontier', pp. 7–8.

⁷⁴ Masson, *Narrative of Various Journeys*, II, p. 161.

similarly, in the Deccan, at the start of the monsoon the pastoral Dhangars of the villages around Kolhapur would drive their herds of sheep away on roads to the north and northeast, into the more arid parts of Maharashtra, away from the moisture of the monsoon, which is harmful to the animals' hoofs and wool.⁷⁵ Pastoralists in India were far from always nomadic communities moving over long distances with all their people, animals and dwellings.⁷⁶ Mountain and pastureland, in particular, blended into each other. And peasants in the river valleys also had pastoral occupations. Various forms of transhumance have been, and still are, widespread in many areas. Transhumance is a form of pastoralism combined with crop cultivation and some form of permanent settlement. It involves only a specialized part of the population which moves with flocks between lowlands and summer pastures in the mountains or, inversely, moves down from the mountains to a coastal strip during winter and spring, or dwells somewhere halfway between winter and summer pastures. Such vertical transhumance has for many centuries been characteristic of the pastoralists of the Himalayas and the hilly flanks of the Deccan plateau—many of whom combine the herding of sheep and goats with the breeding of various kinds of cattle. An extreme form of this is represented by the Kohistanis of the Swat area in the western Himalayas. Others of this kind, such as the Tibetan-speaking Bhotias of Himachal Pradesh, do not engage in crop cultivation, but rely on a combination of sheep/goat and yak pastoralism and trans-Himalayan trade with Tibet and the lower Indian foothills. The Bhotias are exceptional in that they do not cultivate, but they too have a fixed set of dwellings.

In the arid zone of India generally pastoral variability has always been high. Most commonly, Indian pastoralists were involved in a kind of herdsman husbandry. Since arid and humid areas which served as summer and winter pasturages were within relatively short distance to each other, most herds in India, in effect, consisted of cattle, sheep and goats, moving vertically up and down hills or back and forth between riverbeds—many of which turned dry seasonally—or from monsoon grazing on the seasonal grasses of the open lands to the foliage and herbage of the forest tracts.⁷⁷ Horse breeding was

⁷⁵ Sontheimer, 'Pastoral Deities', p. 113.

⁷⁶ For the following passage, see Wink, 'Turko-Mongol Frontier', pp. 201–14.

⁷⁷ For the latter see Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity*, esp. pp. 30, 47.

even more restricted, even though there were some good breeding grounds. Geographically, the distribution of Indian pastoralists varied according to the type of pastoralism, animals exploited, and the environment.⁷⁸ In India, genuine pastoral nomadism existed but was always closely associated with sedentary societies in one way or another, representing a kind of enclosed nomadism. It never constituted an autonomous economic system and it involved distances which, while much longer than those involved in transhumance, were relatively short in comparison with nomads in some parts of the arid zone outside the subcontinent, particularly in Central Asia and the Middle East.

There can be no doubt that the pastoral-nomadic economies of Baluchistan, Sind, and the Afghan borderlands provided the closest approximation that India had to offer—in terms of autonomy, range, and specialization on stockbreeding—to the purely nomadic economies of the arid zone beyond.⁷⁹ But even the pastoral nomads of these areas, it appears from the descriptions, had a range which was relatively limited. The Baluchis are a case in point. They were still entirely nomadic when they moved eastward in the eleventh and twelfth centuries under the impact of the Seljuq invasion of Kirman. They then spread throughout Makran and Sistan and into Sind, and were split into two groups by the resurgent Brahui Khans of Kalāt in the fifteenth century.⁸⁰ They generally appear to have had very large flocks of sheep and goats, besides excellent camels and black cattle, but their horses were rare and small in size, as well as badly tempered.⁸¹ In their domestic habits almost all Baluchis remained pastoral nomads, living in clusters of tents made of black felt or coarse blankets, and, more exceptionally, in mud houses, or even forts, or in huts.⁸² Only a part of the population of Baluchistan in actual fact continued to live a nomadic existence.⁸³ In Sind the breeding and grazing of sheep, and buffaloes, were the regular occupa-

⁷⁸ Cf. R. P. Palmieri, 'Patterns of Indian Pastoralism', in: A. G. Noble and A. K. Dutt (eds), *India: Cultural Patterns and Processes* (Boulder, 1982), p. 326; Sontheimer, *Pastoral Deities*, pp. 8, 12, 15, and *passim*.

⁷⁹ Cf. *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 129–89.

⁸⁰ R. N. Frye, 'Remarks on Baluchi History', *Central Asiatic Journal*, VI (1961), p. 47.

⁸¹ Pottinger, *Travels*, p. 30.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

tions of pastoral nomads in the lower country of the south, while the breeding of goats and camels was the dominant activity in the regions immediately to the east of the Kirthar range and between Multan and Mansura. The Jats were one of the chief pastoral-nomadic divisions here in early-medieval times, and although some of these migrated as far as Iraq, they generally did not move over very long distances on a regular basis. Many Jats migrated to the north, into the Panjab, and here, between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries, the once largely pastoral-nomadic Jat population was transformed into sedentary peasants. Some Jats continued to live in the thinly populated *barr* country between the five rivers of the Panjab, adopting a kind of transhumance, based on the herding of goats and camels. It seems that what happened to the Jats is paradigmatic of most other pastoral and pastoral-nomadic populations in India in the sense that they became ever more closed in by an expanding sedentary-agricultural realm.⁸⁴

The Indian subcontinent has always been ecologically unsuitable for extensive pastoral nomadism, and this explains why it never suffered the massive immigrations of nomadic peoples, complete with herds, that were so characteristic of large parts of Central Asia, Iran, Iraq, and places such as Anatolia, or north-west China. Being a transitional area between the humid tropics and the arid zone, it was however closely linked to the nomadic world of the arid zone as well as the mountainous tribal belt of Afghanistan. This situation ensured that the subcontinent was exposed to the great conquest movements and tribal migrations which characterized especially the medieval period and which originated among the nomadic populations of the arid zone outside of it, but nomadic peoples or people with a recent nomadic background always had to adapt to the new environment in which they found themselves. In almost all cases we find that they had to leave their pastoral nomadism behind. Conquests and migrations occurred, but not nomadization. Here, again, India parts ways with the Mediterranean and with Europe—the latter areas being largely exempt from such movements after the tenth century.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Wink, 'Turko-Mongol Frontier', pp. 206–9.

⁸⁵ As P. Crone puts it, 'Europe lacked ecological niches for nomadic pastoralists and hunter-gatherers, except in the extreme north . . . [and] was well protected against external barbarians' (*Pre-Industrial Societies* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 1989), p. 150).

The Indianized mainland of Southeast Asia was, like the subcontinent, exposed to tribal invasions from the north, but to a much lesser degree. The Burman and Thai peoples came from the arid north, and there have been Mongol incursions in the area as well. But the so-called 'dry zone' of Burma is exceptional in Southeast Asia, and with 1,070 mm of rain per year it is still more humid than any part of the arid zone in India. The extensions of the arid zone into the Indian subcontinent—the biggest single landmass in the Indian Ocean—provided historically important corridors for traffic and movement, connecting, like the navigable rivers, the agrarian core areas with each other and with the areas beyond, and running up to the littoral, and hence the sea lanes as well. This nomadic frontier zone was like the maritime frontier in that it was characterized by mobility and openness. Some of the most important ports of the Indian Ocean were dependent not on river traffic but on caravan traffic through the arid zone; this was the case especially with ports close to Suez—without which the commerce between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean would have collapsed—and with ports of the northern Levant and the Persian Gulf, such as Siraf, Kish, and Hormuz, and also with the Indian ports of Cambay and Surat, in Gujarat.⁸⁶ In the Indian subcontinent the arid or semi-arid frontier zones were on the interface of agrarian expansion and pastoral nomadism, and hence they were often also the zones of violent conflict, of maximum tension, and it was in these interstitial areas that the Islamic conquest states gained their first footholds.

If this fusion of nomadic frontier and settled society occurred in the medieval period, in the later part of the first millennium and the first half of the second millennium AD, it is because in these centuries the arid zone everywhere gained significantly in importance as a conduit of people and animals, and hence in political importance as well. The reasons for the medieval upsurge in power of the arid zone are complex, and to some extent will probably always remain the subject of speculation. But it is likely that these had to do with demographic as well as military factors.⁸⁷ Pastoral-nomadic societies probably had a higher demographic growth rate, due to healthier living conditions and the dispersal of their populations, than

⁸⁶ Cf. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, pp. 167, 169.

⁸⁷ Wink, 'India and the Turko-Mongol Frontier.'

the densely packed peasant societies in the humid river plains. Hence the paradox is that the poor lands of the arid zone, with small populations (perhaps a few million in Iran and Central Asia each), were more prone to overpopulation than the agricultural plains of India, which could easily accommodate a hundred million people or more in medieval times. Demographic pressure in the nomadic societies of the arid zone may have provided the drive behind the conquest and migration movements of medieval, as they probably had, to a lesser extent, of ancient times. A second factor was that the nomads had access to an unlimited supply of better horses than could ever be made available in the humid conditions of India. Mounted archery, in combination with changes in military organization, technology, and tactics related to superior mobility, gave medieval nomadic peoples a decisive military advantage over the sedentary ones.

Within the medieval Indian subcontinent, too, the arid zone territories became a major corridor of migration and movement of people.⁸⁸ The Muslim conquests and migrations in these centuries brought the arid zone to the centre of developments. At the same time, previously marginal groups living on the frontier of settled society within the subcontinent rose to power. People from the pastoral backwoods emerged under such dynasties as the Yadavas, Hoysalas and Kakatiyas, and under the Vijayanagara kings of the peninsula. From the Turkish- and Afghan-held territories of the north to the deep south, new military, commercial and political networks of unprecedented intensity were brought into play along the frontier of settled society. Typically the new capitals of the first half of the second millennium—among which Delhi, Devagiri, Warangal, Dvarasamudram, and then Bijapur, Golkonda, and Vijayanagara—were all located on the fringes of the arid or semi-arid zone and functioned as major centres for the recruitment of man- and animal-power.⁸⁹ Situated on the interface of the settled world and the world of the marches, the eccentric new capitals could mediate between sedentary investment and the mobilization of the resources of military entrepreneurs, merchants and pastoralists. These medieval cities were the product of the fusion of the nomadic frontier with settled society. They belonged to new, more powerful, horse-riding warrior elites which emerged on the arid peripheries of

⁸⁸ *Al-Hind, II*; Gommans, 'Silent Frontier' & 'Eurasian Frontier.'

⁸⁹ Gommans, 'Silent Frontier', p. 15.

the old agrarian societies. Geography, in this way, shaped the contours of medieval government. The rationalization of the fiscal structures of settled society and the expansion of populations came to depend on the measures with which the Islamic rulers, successively, bore down on peasant society. Over time, the mobilization of agrarian resources was vastly enhanced, and trade increased, giving a higher profile to commercial and financial groups.

THE MARITIME FRONTIER

The important contrast to be drawn is not between land and sea but rather between settled river plains on the one hand and arid zone and sea on the other. The agrarian economy of settled society was normally characterized by small circles of local consumption. Human life in the densely settled river plains was closely regulated, and here everything aimed at the preservation of a precarious balance. Covered from time immemorial by an intricate web of rights and shares in the agricultural produce, it was also characterized by dense and complex networks of ties of interdependence and offered little or no room for innovation and extraneous movement.⁹⁰ Openness, fluidity and movement were characteristic of both the inland, arid zone and of the coastal, maritime frontier. Here we find comparable natural conditions, determined by geography, and heterogeneous populations and facilities geared to long-distance travel.⁹¹

Both the desert and the ocean were the domain of long-distance trade and raiding, of precious metals and other forms of mobile wealth. The ocean only more so. Generally, water transportation had a decisive cost advantage over land transportation, and, if there was a choice, and everything else being equal, the first would be chosen. Estimates show that an Indian Ocean dhow could travel the same distance as a camel caravan in one third of the time, while an average dhow could carry the equivalent of a thousand camel loads, and merely one crew member was needed for several tons of cargo, as compared with two or more men for each ton in a camel caravan.⁹²

⁹⁰ J. C. Heesterman, 'The Tides of the Indian Ocean' (Unpublished paper presented at UW-Madison, October 11, 1999).

⁹¹ See also Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders*, p. 38.

⁹² Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders*, p. 39.

The world's largest arid zone was not only functionally similar but also comparable in size to what the Arab geographers of the medieval age considered to be the largest sea in the inhabited world, the *Baḥr al-Hind* or 'Indian Ocean'.⁹³ Al-Mas'ūdī believed that 'its length from west to east, i.e. from Abyssinia to the limits of India and China (*min aqṣā al-ḥabash ilā aqṣā al-hind wa-ṣ-ṣīn*), is thirteen thousand kilometres'.⁹⁴ The same ocean was also called the *Baḥr al-Kabīr* or 'Great Sea' in medieval navigational texts and travel accounts.⁹⁵ Even more ambiguously, it was regarded as a part of the *Baḥr al-Muḥīt*, 'the Encompassing Sea,' the *ūqyānūs* of the Greeks.⁹⁶ More concretely, like the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean was effectively not one sea but a complex of seas, peninsulas and islands, extending southward and eastward from the *Baḥr al-Qulzum* or 'Red Sea' in the west to as far east as the *Baḥr al-Ẓābij* or 'Java Sea' and the *Baḥr aṣ-Ṣīn* or '(South) China Sea'.⁹⁷ And the bulk of navigational movement in all subregions of the Indian Ocean was coastwise, or at least within sight of a coast, with small vessels.⁹⁸ Conducting small transactions from anchorage to anchorage, the journey from Madagascar to Muscat would take two months, from Basra to Bandar Abbas three weeks, from Basra to Cochin three-and-a-half months, and so on.⁹⁹ Trans-oceanic travel was frequently undertaken as well, but was more hazardous than coastal cruising and required considerable knowledge of astronomy.¹⁰⁰

The most important unifying factor throughout the Indian Ocean, which made navigation possible, were the monsoon winds.¹⁰¹ These

⁹³ C. Barnier de Meynar and P. de Courteille (eds and transl.), *Maḥoudi: Les Prairies d'Or, Tome Premier* (Paris, 1861) p. 231.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 230–1. He equates it with the *Baḥr al-Ḥabashī* or 'Abyssinian Sea.'

⁹⁵ G. R. Tibbetts (transl.), *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean before the Coming of the Portuguese, being a translation of Kitāb al-Fawā'id fī usūl al-baḥr wa'l-qawā'id of Ahmad b. Mājid al-Najdī, together with an introduction on the history of Arab navigation, notes on the navigational techniques and the topography of the Indian Ocean, and a glossary of navigational terms* (London, 1971), pp. xi, 396–8, 66; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah, III*, p. 112.

⁹⁶ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, *ibid.* Indo-Persian chronicles refer to the Indian Ocean as the *Daryā-y Muḥīt* (*KF*, p. 48).

⁹⁷ G. F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times; revised and expanded by John Carswell* (Princeton, 1995), pp. 85–86; De Meynard and De Courteille, *Maḥoudi, I*, pp. 238, 242–3; Braudel, *Mediterranean, I*, p. 23.

⁹⁸ R. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas, 1640–1700* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 10–12.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 360–1, 396; Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, pp. 105–14.

¹⁰¹ Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders*, pp. 51–52; Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, p. 10;

seasonal winds, occurring with great regularity, determined the timing and progress of sea-voyages—as they did of land-voyages—and they allowed ships to travel from Malacca almost to Jiddah on one wind. Over the centuries, Persian, Arab, Indian, and Chinese pilots developed an elaborate navigational science from experience, oral tradition, and maritime diagrams or maps and compendia, and much of this knowledge was treated as highly secretive.¹⁰² From the Red Sea to the coasts of Kalimantan we find hereditary guilds of pilots which carefully protected, through oral transmission, their detailed knowledge of the winds, the seasonal storms (*tūfān*), of currents, coast-lines, estuaries, sandbanks, cliffs, and coral reefs.¹⁰³ Underwater coral reefs which sometimes stretched for kilometres were perhaps the most serious obstacle to any type of navigation. They posed a particularly great danger in the Red Sea, in parts of the Persian Gulf, on the southern Arabian coast, in parts of the Bay of Bengal, the Malay-Indonesian archipelago and the South China Sea.¹⁰⁴ Shipbuilding, however, adjusted to their presence as much as possible. The *dhows* and other types of Indian Ocean vessels, no matter what size, were stitched together with rope rather than nailed with iron in order to better withstand a possible collision with coral reefs.¹⁰⁵ And the large

J. Poujade, *La route des Indes et ses navires* (Paris, 1947); Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, pp. 128–9; Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 360–87.

¹⁰² Cf. *Al-Hind*, I, p. 49; Mills, *Ma Huan*, pp. 306–9; B. Arunchalam, 'The Heaven-Finding Art in Indian Navigational Tradition and Cartography', in: S. Chandra (ed.), *The Indian Ocean: explorations in history, commerce, and politics* (New Delhi, 1987), pp. 191–221.

¹⁰³ Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, pp. 10–60; L. Varadarajan, 'Traditions of Indigenous Navigation in Gujarat', *South Asia*, n. s., 3, 1 (1981), pp. 28–35; A. L. Basham, 'Notes on Seafaring in Ancient India', *Art and Letters, The Journal of the Royal India and Pakistan Society*, 23 (1949), p. 26; Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 135, 379–87.

¹⁰⁴ The conditions for the growth of coral reefs (through the build-up of lime from seawater by polyps over thousands of years) include warm water, normal to high salinity, and the absence of turbidity. Hence they were present in those areas where there are no major rivers with heavy siltloads debouching into the ocean nor volcanic ashes held in suspension in the water. See R. Little, 'An Essay on Coral Reefs as the Cause of Blakan Mati Fever, and of the Fevers in various Parts of the East', *The Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, II (1848), pp. 597–8; Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 379–87; D. E. Sopher, *The Sea Nomads: A Study based on the Literature of the Maritime Boat People of Southeast Asia* (Singapore, 1964), pp. 15–16; G. Schott, *Geographie des Indischen und Stillen Ozeans* (Hamburg, 1935).

¹⁰⁵ Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, pp. 88, 92–96; Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, pp. 149–50; Basham, 'Notes', p. 65; Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 47–49.

Chinese junks had hulls with watertight bulkheads which would limit the flooding of the ship if it were pierced.¹⁰⁶

The second most important unifying factor in the Indian Ocean, indispensable in the development of navigation, was the availability of wood suitable for shipbuilding. The timbers of the hulls of ships had to be made either of teak wood or coconut wood, and if such woods were not locally available they could fairly easily be supplied from elsewhere.¹⁰⁷ In Arabia and the Persian Gulf, and anywhere to the south of Suez, there was no wood production suitable for the building of ocean-going ships.¹⁰⁸ Oak forests abounded in southwest Persia but their trees were too small for shipbuilding, whereas the timber that could be obtained in the Eritrean plain on the Red Sea was inferior even to that which could be obtained in Persia.¹⁰⁹ All Arabian and Persian dhows, however, were either built in India or were built of timber brought from there.¹¹⁰ Teak grew in abundance in the Konkan and South India, as also in Burma, Thailand, and along the northcoast of Java, near Japara and Rembang, as well as on the islands to the east of Java.¹¹¹ Coconut or *Jawz al-Hindī* ('the Indian nut') was similarly obtained from South India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and from the Maldivé and Laccadive islands, which became major centres of shipbuilding in their own right.¹¹²

Already in ancient times, when shipping and maritime enterprise had just begun to show their potential, Sanskrit texts portrayed the ocean as a source of immense wealth, *ratnākara*, 'a mine of jewels,' but not as a source of social status.¹¹³ The literary remains of all agrarian civilizations around the Indian Ocean are replete with denunciations of the people who made the sea their domain, just as they are replete with denunciations of pastoral nomads. Free from hierarchic constraint, the seaboard, like the desert, was seen as a place of heresy and sedition.¹¹⁴ In Indian writings, throughout history, the ocean was, thus,

¹⁰⁶ Mills, *Ma Huan*, pp. 303–6; Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, pp. 141–2, 154–5.

¹⁰⁷ Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, pp. 89–90.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

¹⁰⁹ J. M. Kinneir, *Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire* (London, 1813), pp. 3 ff.

¹¹⁰ Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, pp. 5–6.

¹¹¹ D. Lombard, *Le Carrefour Javanais: Essai d'Histoire Globale*, 3 Volumes (Paris, 1990), II, p. 86.

¹¹² Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 91.

¹¹³ Basham, 'Notes', p. 69; Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, p. 122.

¹¹⁴ As in the *Prabodhacandrodaya*, where Jainism and 'other heretical sects' are associated with both these habitats; cf. *Al-Hind*, II, p. 354.

frequently associated with a chaotic malevolence that contrasted sharply with the order and quietude of the land.¹¹⁵ There was nothing specifically Indian about this. An attitude of mistrust or ambivalence towards the sea is perhaps a hallmark of all settled life. Like the desert, the sea is ultimately a wilderness, a place where there is no community and where the individual is free from the constraints of community life, and where the ranking order of settled society breaks down.¹¹⁶ Early writings of the western Semites depict the ocean as a place of darkness and an ungodly, negative, chaotic power, the realm of death, as well as a productive, positive, cosmic power, as the fountain of life.¹¹⁷ In the Western tradition the roots of fear and repulsion inspired by the sea go back to the Bible, where the ocean is portrayed as the undifferentiated primordial substance on which form had to be imposed to become part of Creation.¹¹⁸ The Flood marked a temporary return to Chaos, while the endless movement of the seas suggested the possibility of a new flood.¹¹⁹ The ocean inspired mistrust and a deep sense of repulsion throughout the classical age.¹²⁰ Horace, Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid, and later Seneca, detested the 'unsociable' ocean that kept men apart.¹²¹ Among Greek philosophers, Pittacus proclaimed that for him 'trustworthy' meant 'the earth,' while 'untrustworthy' meant 'the sea.'¹²² Plato could conceive of the sea as 'a teacher of vice,' and a medieval vision of the Mediterranean by Opicino de Canistris labels it *causa peccati*, 'the cause of sin,' depicting its Levantine end as a devil's head.¹²³ The medieval image of the sea as the natural setting for unexpected violence was strengthened by the recollections of the

¹¹⁵ F. W. Clothey, 'Pilgrimage Centers in the Tamil Cultus of Murukan', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 40 (1972), pp. 91-92.

¹¹⁶ Cf. W. H. Auden, *The Enchafed Flood or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea* (London, 1949), pp. 25-26.

¹¹⁷ A. J. Wensinck, *The Ocean in the Literature of the Western Semites* (Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeling Letterkunde, nieuwe reeks, deel xix, no. 2) (Amsterdam, 1918), esp. pp. 40-45, 49, 56, 65.

¹¹⁸ Auden, *Enchafed Flood*, pp. 18-19; A. Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 1-3.

¹¹⁹ Corbin, *Lure of the Sea*, *ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹²² Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2 Volumes (London, 1980), I, p. 79.

¹²³ Plato, as reported by Strabo's *Geography* 7. 3. 8 (Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*, title page; for the medieval representation by Opicino de Canistris, *ibid.*, frontispiece).

many scourges that came from the sea: traces of Norman and Saracen invasions, the spreading of the Black Death by the sea, and the misdeeds of pirates and smugglers.¹²⁴ Even in early Flemish and Dutch seascape paintings the ocean, in its shifting immensity, was the bearer of misfortune, with the waves representing the fragility of life itself and the precariousness of human institutions, and the people of the seashore as repulsive as the sea itself.¹²⁵ Indian writings, it thus appears, reflect an attitude that was widely shared among literate people in ancient and medieval times.

But some Hindu lawmakers went so far as to explicitly ban travel by sea, warning at the same time against interaction with barbarians and the ritual defilement that such interaction entailed.¹²⁶ These prohibitions appear to have been taken seriously by many high-caste Hindus, especially brahmans. By early medieval times, deeply entrenched maritime taboos and *thalassophobia* are in evidence among the Hindus of Malabar.¹²⁷ Such attitudes persisted over time. Pires, in the early sixteenth century, writes:

'All the kings who live in Malabar are always at war with one another—on land, because the Nayar's religion forbids him to eat at sea, except by permission of his chief Brahman in case of dire necessity. The Brahmans go to sea even less.'¹²⁸

To be sure, in other parts of coastal India, Hindus of all castes are known to have made overseas voyages routinely and even to have settled overseas, while for Buddhists ritual purity played no role and neither did prohibitions against sea travel.¹²⁹ Even so, Indian literature, whether Hindu or Buddhist, offers no passages praising life at sea. Yajñavalkya emphasizes both the profitability and uncertainty of maritime trade, but the implicit attitude towards the sea among Hindu legal scholars has generally been one of fear and distaste.¹³⁰ Everywhere in the Indian peninsula, the seaboard was seen as a place of ambiguity and extraordinary licence, its meat-eating,

¹²⁴ Corbin, *Lure of the Sea*, p. 14.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

¹²⁶ Basham, 'Notes', pp. 67–68.

¹²⁷ Cf. *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 72–73.

¹²⁸ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 81.

¹²⁹ Basham, 'Notes', pp. 67–68; for attitudes towards the sea, see also Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, pp. 121–2; Sopher, *Sea Nomads*, pp. v–vi.

¹³⁰ Basham, 'Notes', pp. 62, 69.

liquor-drinking and promiscuous inhabitants occupying a place at the bottom of the caste hierarchy—if they were not downright outcasts—and quick to convert to the *mleccha* religion of Islam.

In a similar way, in Old-Javanese literature the sea in general kept the repulsive aspect of the southcoast, as in the myths of the Goddess of the Southern Ocean, and there are no themes of maritime adventure, in spite of the fact that the Javanese had been committed to navigation for many centuries.¹³¹ In the *Wayang* repertory there are no references to the sea. And agrarian Mataram has always persisted in regarding the *pasisir* oligarchies as rebels. To find a more positive attitude towards the sea and navigation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries we have to go as far as Sulawesi, to the earliest materials, with a pronounced maritime orientation, that went into the Bugi epic of *La Galigo*. But it is not until the formation of the great maritime sultanates of Achin, Johore and Malacca in the western archipelago that a quasi-modern affirmation of the superiority of man on the ocean finally begins to replace the older anxieties.¹³²

It is, then, not surprising that the social position of the people who lived off the sea was low, or at least marginal, everywhere in the Indian Ocean. Such people included fishermen, mollusc-gatherers, coral-divers, pearlfishers, boatbuilders, rope-makers, netmenders, common seafarers or sailors, coastal saltmakers, marine foragers, and a variety of other coastdwellers. They constituted a clearly recognizable category, even though our knowledge of them is fragmentary. Studies of the maritime castes of western India which were conducted at the end of the nineteenth century show them to be at the lowest level in the social hierarchy.¹³³ The various Konkani castes of fishermen, and the Khār wās and Sanghārs of Gujarat, were regarded as the descendants of medieval pirates, and they all ate fish, sometimes certain kinds of meat (such as mutton, goat, wild hog, fowl) as well, and drank liquor, while practicing widow remarriage and other customs that Hemadri condemned as *kalivarjya* sins. Similarly condemned practices prevailed among such fishermen castes of Thana as the

¹³¹ Lombard, *Carrefour Javanais*, II, pp. 84–85; D. Lombard, 'Le thème de la mer dans les littératures et les mentalités de l'archipel insulindien', *Archipel*, 20 (1980), pp. 317–28; B. Schrieke, 'De Javanen als zee- en handelsvolk', *Tijdschrift van het Bataafsche Genootschap*, LVIII (1919), pp. 424–8.

¹³² Lombard, 'Thème', p. 324.

¹³³ Basham, 'Notes', pp. 68–69.

Bhois, Kharvis, Machhis, Mangelas, and Kolis.¹³⁴ And there is the Mukkuvan caste of fishermen which was numerous on the Malabar coast (whose name derives from the Dravidian *mukkuha*, 'to dive,' and was also known as Mucuar) and in the fifteenth century was considered as very unclean by the Nayars and other high-caste Hindus, and as 'the lowest of men' by Ma Huan.¹³⁵ They ranked among the castes that were too low to be tolerated on the roads that were frequented by the Nayars. They too had a reputation for piracy. And it was among people like these that the Muslims originally inserted themselves through the institution of *mut'a* or 'temporary marriage'.¹³⁶ On the Coromandel coast we find, in the descriptions of early Jesuit missionaries, castes of fishermen with similar names, such as Mukkuvar and Machuas, which were prone to piracy and raiding and were regarded as the lowest of the Hindu untouchables.¹³⁷ Equally obscure was the caste of Mohannas of the Indus river and delta, consisting of fishermen and birdhunters ('Mirbahar') and boatmen ('Mallah') living in impermanent villages and reed huts which were moved about according to the rhythm of the river's inundations, and on whose 'Dundis' and other boats all local commerce in Sind has depended since time immemorial.¹³⁸

Fishing populations in the western Indian Ocean, such as the whalehunters of the Zanj, or the nomadic groups of the coastal waters of Oman and eastern Arabia (which were particularly rich in fish), often lived in places so remote that descriptions of them are quite rare, especially in earlier times.¹³⁹ Their social position is better described as marginal rather than low. In 1889, the Dutch Consul-General in Bushire, Baron R. C. Keun de Hoogerwoerd, provided a precious account of a mobile fishing society of about 25,000 people with 2,500 boats then operating in the western Indian Ocean.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Volume XIII, Part 1, Thana* (Bombay, 1882), pp. 146-9.

¹³⁵ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 67 and note 2, 72, 81 and note 3; Mills, *Ma Huan*, pp. 133-4, and see p. 138.

¹³⁶ Cf. *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 279-80; Bouchon, 'Musulmans de Kerala', p. 57.

¹³⁷ Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, p. 121.

¹³⁸ G. Mustafa Shar, 'The Mohanna—An Unknown Life on the Indus River', *Reports on Field Work Carried out at Mohenjo-Daro: Interim Reports, Volume 2, Pakistan 1983-4 by the Ismeo-Aachen University Mission*, edited by M. Jansen and G. Urban, pp. 169-78.

¹³⁹ See however Barbier de Meynard and De Courteille, *Maçoudi*, I, p. 234.

¹⁴⁰ 'Die Häfen und Handelsverhältnisse des Persischen Golfs und des Golfs von

This fishing society was made up of Arabs, Persians and Baluchis, joined in the winter by other coastal inhabitants from Socotra and Mahra. As 'true nomads of the sea' ('*wahre Nomaden des Meeres*'), they lived on the water and changed their residence seasonally.¹⁴¹ For about three months they would stay on the coast of Baluchistan, salting and drying their fish, and then returned to Oman. They sold large quantities of salted, dried fish for export to India, the Yemen and Mauritius, and they would go to Jiddah to sell it during the Hajj.¹⁴² For all we know, the conditions of these and similar populations of fishermen working off the coasts of Oman and eastern Arabia have not changed much over the centuries.¹⁴³ Particularly the Arab shore of the Persian Gulf has always remained very isolated, with lone fishing hamlets where even the goats fed on fish flour.¹⁴⁴ On these and other shores of the 'Eritrean Sea,' Greek and Latin works already identified a primitive fisheating population known as 'Ichthyophag[o]i.' 'Nomads and Ichthyophagoi' lived in mean coastal huts, in scattered groups, some with holy men, wearing loincloths of palmleaves or going about naked.¹⁴⁵ The production of dried and salted fish appears to have had ancient, even Harappan, roots among such people.

Fishing and the production of dried, salted fish was, without doubt, a major industry, with deep inland connections, in all parts of the medieval Indian Ocean. It was especially important in the Maldivian islands, southern Arabia, Aden and Somalia, but perhaps nowhere as much as in the Malay states in the Strait of Malacca, and among the Sama-speaking people in the Sulu archipelago.¹⁴⁶ The coasts and islands of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago have always had the greatest wealth of marine life due to the abundance of coral reefs

Oman: Nach dem Bericht des General-Konsuls der Niederlande zu Buschehr, Baron R. C. Keun de Hoogerwoerd', *Annalen der Hydrographie und Maritimen Meteorologie*, 17 (1889), p. 204.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ See D. T. Potts, *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity*, 2 Volumes (Oxford, 1990), I, p. 57.

¹⁴⁴ Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁵ Casson, *Periplus*, pp. 51–52, 63, 67, 71, 98, 175.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. *Al-Hind*, II, p. 284; Martin and Martin, *Cargoes of the East*, pp. 51–52; C. Sather, 'Sea Nomads and Rainforest Hunter-Gatherers: Foraging Adaptations in the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago', in: P. Bellwood, J. J. Fox and D. Tryon (eds), *The Austronesians: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (Canberra, 1995), pp. 245 and note 8, 249.

and mangrove associations.¹⁴⁷ Correspondingly, it is here that the largest proportions of people dependent on the sea could be found.¹⁴⁸ Here their historical role was often quite prominent, more so than anywhere else. Yet, here too, coastal fishing communities have never enjoyed a high status.¹⁴⁹ The People of the Sea which are collectively referred to by the Malay term *Orang Laut*, inhabiting the islands and estuaries of the Riau-Lingga and Bantam archipelagoes as well as the coasts and offshore islands of the Strait of Malacca, and up to Kalimantan, have generally been held in contempt by land-based Malay people.¹⁵⁰ They comprised a variety of often nomadic boat-dwelling and coastal hut-dwelling collectors and fishermen, who drew their subsistence exclusively from the sea or the immediate seaboard, and whose lifestyle became paradigmatic for a whole range of groups across the length and breadth of the archipelago, and who, in due course, came to be loosely labeled as *Orang Laut* in a broad sense as well.¹⁵¹ The *Orang Laut* of the Strait of Malacca were also known as the *Orang Selat* or 'People of the Strait,' the *Celates* or *Selates* of Portuguese authors, 'a low, vile people' in the estimate of De Barros, prone to piracy and slaver raiding.¹⁵² There were subgroups among them which were known by such local names as *Orang Sletar*, *Orang Mantong* or *Orang Kuala*.¹⁵³ All were considered to be very uncouth and pagan by the Malay. The *Orang Sletar*, named after a river in the south of Johore, and living in the narrow channels of a swamp delta, in mangrove forests, ate pork and were a wandering population at the margins of Malay society.¹⁵⁴ The *Orang Mantong* were 'very dirty, pagan, eaters of pork, and living with dogs.'¹⁵⁵ The *Orang Kuala* or 'People of the Estuaries,' fishermen who live on both sides of the

¹⁴⁷ Sather, 'Sea Nomads', p. 238.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Sather, 'Sea Nomads', p. 238.

¹⁵⁰ Ch. Pelras, 'Notes sur Quelques Populations Aquatiques de L'Archipel Nusantara', *Archipel*, 2 (1972), pp. 133-68; Sopher, *Sea Nomads*; Sather, 'Sea Nomads', p. 240.

¹⁵¹ Pelras, 'Notes', p. 133.

¹⁵² Quoted in Sopher, *Sea Nomads*, p. 316.

¹⁵³ F. M. Lebar (ed.), *Ethnic Groups of Insular Southeast Asia, Volume I* (New Haven, 1975), p. 13.

¹⁵⁴ Pelras, 'Notes', pp. 148-50; J. R. Logan, 'The Orang Sletar of the Rivers and Creeks of the Old Strait and Estuary of the Johore', *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, I (1847), pp. 302-4.

¹⁵⁵ Pelras, 'Notes', pp. 138, 142.

Strait of Malacca (the majority on the Sumatra side) in mangrove forests and on open river estuaries, insist that they arrived prior to the Malay (who look down on them), and that they are not pagan, i.e. do not consume pork and dugong nor have dogs on their boats; but even now they have but the thinnest Islamic veneer, and practice no sex segregation whatsoever.¹⁵⁶

Among the Orang Laut in a broad sense are the *Moken*, the *Moklen* and the *Urak Lawoi* tribes living in the amphibious environment of Thailand's westcoast and the Mergui archipelago, subsistence-oriented, animistic strand-dwelling gatherers of sea-produce, tripang, shellfish, fish, lobsters, coral and shells, who also sometimes planted shoreline gardens.¹⁵⁷ The *Urak Lawoi* say 'they cannot sleep if they do not hear the waves,' and, with the Moklen, live in sea-side villages, while the Moken are seafaring nomads living largely on the islands. Collectively they were called *Orang Laut* by the Malay, *Chaaw Thalee* or 'Sea People,' and *Chaaw Nam* or 'Water People' by the Thai. In Thai the Moklen call themselves *Chaaw Bok*, 'Coastal People,' in contrast to *Chaaw Ko*, 'Island People,' meaning the Moken, whereas *Urak Lawoi* is their dialect's equivalent of Orang Laut. They were, according to one recent author, 'scarcely better off than the mud-fish on which they live.'¹⁵⁸

The most widely dispersed ethnolinguistic group of seafaring populations in the eastern archipelago were the *Sama* (more precisely the 'Sama-speaking people') or *Bajau*.¹⁵⁹ Their original homeland appears to have been in the Sulu-Zamboanga region.¹⁶⁰ Here they were engaged in commercial fishing, used rather large ships, became familiar with the high seas, and started to make long journeys.¹⁶¹ They then first expanded along the eastern coasts of Kalimantan, on the route from Malacca to the Philippines, then southward to Sulawesi,

¹⁵⁶ Pelras, 'Notes', pp. 136-8, 142.

¹⁵⁷ D. W. Hogan, 'Men of the Sea: Coastal Tribes of South Thailand's West Coast', *Journal of the Siam Society*, 60, 1 (January, 1972), pp. 204, 206; Sather, 'Sea Nomads', pp. 249-50; Lebar, *Ethnic Groups*, I, p. 13.

¹⁵⁸ W. G. White, *The Sea Gypsies of Malaya, An Account of the Nomadic Mawken People of the Mergui Archipelago with a Description of their Ways of Living, Customs, Habits, Boats, Occupations* (London, 1922), p. 5.

¹⁵⁹ Pelras, 'Notes', pp. 152-68; C. Sather, 'Boat Crews and Fishing Fleets: the Social Organization of Maritime Labour among the Bajau Laut of Southeastern Sabah', *Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography*, 4 (August, 1985), pp. 165-214.

¹⁶⁰ Sather, 'Boat Crews', p. 168.

¹⁶¹ Pelras, 'Notes', p. 166.

and from there over widely scattered areas of eastern Indonesia, south and eastward to Flores and the southern Moluccas, well before European contact.¹⁶² Pires characterized 'the Bajuus' he encountered in the Sulawesi region in the early sixteenth century as 'corsairs,' and these appear to have been an elite among them.¹⁶³ The more common shore-based Sama-Bajau were fishermen, seamen, boat-builders, interisland carriers, and so on, in the regional trading states of the Tausig of the Sulu Sultanate, and later the Malay of Kalimantan, and the Bugis of Makassar.¹⁶⁴ The Tausig landed elite seems to have emerged around the thirteenth century, in the relatively populous central islands (suitable for dry rice agriculture) of the Sulu archipelago, when Jolo was becoming a major commercial centre.¹⁶⁵ With the coming of Islam the Tausig assumed dominance over all the other Sama-speaking populations of the Sulu islands.¹⁶⁶ The Tausig were the main agrarian population and trading class, laying claim to greater Islamic purity, while the Sama-Bajau were beneath them, divided in a multitude of smaller groups without political integration, distinguished toponymically by place or region of origin.¹⁶⁷ The one exception were the nomadic boat people who were only distinguished by their way of life.¹⁶⁸ At the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy was, thus, the subgroup of Sama-speaking fishermen who were known as the *Bajau Laut* or *Sama Dilaut*, in other words 'Sea Bajau,' and lived scattered throughout the Sulu realm and beyond.¹⁶⁹ The nomadic Bajau Laut fishermen lived aboard boats and consisted of localized bands of families which periodically returned to a common anchorage site.¹⁷⁰ Band membership was defined by recurrent moorage at the same site, and a limited sense of regional identity was

¹⁶² Pelras, 'Notes', pp. 159-61; Sather, 'Boat Crews', p. 166.

¹⁶³ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 226-7; Pelras, *Bugis*, p. 17; N. M. Saleeby, *The History of Sulu* (Manila, 1908), p. 49.

¹⁶⁴ Sather, 'Boat Crews', p. 168; Sather, 'Sea Nomads', p. 242.

¹⁶⁵ C. Sather, 'Sea and Shore People: Ethnicity and Ethnic Interaction in Southeastern Sabah', *Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography*, 3 (December, 1984), pp. 3-5; Saleeby, *History of Sulu*; T. M. Kiefer, 'The Tausig Polity and the Sultanate of Sulu: A Segmentary State in the Southern Philippines', *Sulu Studies*, I (1972), pp. 21-23.

¹⁶⁶ Sather, 'Sea and Shore People', p. 5.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 8.

¹⁷⁰ Sather, 'Boat Crews', pp. 165, 168, 170.

obtained by the burying of the dead upon a common cemetery island.¹⁷¹ As specialized fishing and maritime foragers they supplied tripang, sharks' fin and dried fish, mother of pearl, sea slugs, tortoiseshell, pearls, seashells, coral and seaweed, and coastal products such as dye-yielding roots of coastal forest plants, mangrove bark, resins, birds' nests, and the like.¹⁷² To other Sama groups the Bajau Laut were known as 'Sama Pala'au' and '*Luvvaan*'—the latter meaning 'that which was spat out,' referring to the myth that the Bajau Laut were rejected by God and thus forced to follow their present way of life as a curse.¹⁷³ The surrounding shore people said that the Bajau Laut lived like 'flotsam' (buat kampal); never making a permanent home ashore they were forever 'drifting' (makatandan).¹⁷⁴ They stood outside the Islamic society of the Tausig and other Sama-speaking peoples. They were spiritually cursed (ka sukna).¹⁷⁵ Dispersed and without leadership, and without masjid, their exclusion from the faith symbolized their stigmatized status.¹⁷⁶

Amidst the often confusing ethnonymic variations, it would be wrong to make sharp distinctions among the various coastal and seafaring populations according to occupation. They were generally not very specialized. More particularly, our sources do not draw a sharp line of differentiation between the People of the Sea or Orang Laut generally and 'corsairs', 'robbers', and 'pirates.' The maritime frontier has been the domain of outlaws until fairly recently, and in some respects it still is. Even around the turn of the nineteenth century, Joseph Conrad could still describe 'a true Orang Laut' as someone 'living by rapine and plunder of coasts and ships in his prosperous says; earning his living by honest and irksome toil when the days of adversity were upon him.'¹⁷⁷ Babalatchi was one of these Orang Laut, 'who hated the white men who interfered with the manly pursuits of throat-cutting, kidnapping, slave-dealing, and fire-raising, that were the only possible occupation for a true man of the sea.'¹⁷⁸

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹⁷² Pelras, *Bugis*, p. 18.

¹⁷³ Sather, 'Sea and Sea People', p. 12.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁷⁷ *Outcast of the Islands*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Piscatorial pursuits, in particular, would easily alternate with piratical outbreaks.¹⁷⁹ Barbosa writes about a small town on the Malabar coast,

‘where dwell many Heathen fishers whose livelihood in the winter season is nought but fishery, and in the summer they live by robbery of all they can find, and everything they can take on the sea. They are great oarsmen . . . armed with bows.’¹⁸⁰

In the Indonesian archipelago it has often been observed that fishing communities with little or no land engaged in raids in the interior as well as along the coasts.¹⁸¹ Fishermen and mariners were poor and rapacious, living ‘in circumstances which beget a piratical character,’ while the agricultural populations of Java and Sumatra never committed piracy.¹⁸² Piracy and other forms of predatory activity on a small scale were most commonly conducted on a part-time basis by fishermen and traders, such as the scattered Bajau and others, with weapons that could include bows but that might at times have been no better than fire-scorched bamboo canes which had been trimmed as lances.¹⁸³ Full-time pirates in the islands of Makassar (‘who live on that alone’) sailed in prahus too light to attack junks.¹⁸⁴ Prior to the eighteenth century the great pirate fleets, consisting of dozens of ships, of the Iranun and Balangingi setting out from the Sulu islands—Conrad’s ‘*Sulu rovers*’—on raiding expeditions that lasted for months or years, did not yet exist.¹⁸⁵ But even before the sixteenth century, there were well-organized pirates, exclusively devoted to raiding, who could operate in formidable fleets. With their oared vessels (‘great rowing barks’), they posed a terrible danger to ships that relied exclusively on sail. Such heavily armed pirates with rowing

¹⁷⁹ J. Spencer, ‘Piracy in the Indian Archipelago’, *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, III (Singapore, 1849), pp. 585–6.

¹⁸⁰ Duarte Barbosa, II, pp. 95–96.

¹⁸¹ See for instance R. H. Barnes, *Sea Hunters of Indonesia: Fishers and Weavers of Malakera* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 1–3.

¹⁸² Spencer, ‘Piracy and Slave Trade’, p. 45.

¹⁸³ Barnes, *Sea Hunters*, p. 14; Healey, ‘Tribes and States’, pp. 3, 20; J. F. Warren, *The Sulu Zone 1768–1898: The Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State* (Singapore, 1981); Sopher, *Sea Nomads*, pp. 314, 317; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, pp. 233, 235, 238; Bouchon and Thomaz, *Voyage*, p. 311.

¹⁸⁴ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 227–8.

¹⁸⁵ Spencer, ‘Piracy and Slave Trade’, p. 153; Barnes, *Sea Hunters*, p. 14; Healey, ‘Tribes and States’, pp. 18, 20.

boats are mentioned everywhere.¹⁸⁶ Barbosa, again, writes of the pirates/fishermen of the 'Kingdom of Coilam' in Malabar:

'They are great oarsmen and a multitude of them gather together all armed with bows and arrows in plenty, and thus they surround any vessel they can find becalmed, with flights of arrows until they take and rob it. Those who are taken therein are put ashore.'¹⁸⁷

Small refractory rulers in Sumatra, on the Canara coast, or the Konkan, equipped pirate fleets of twenty, thirty, or forty, even three hundred vessels.¹⁸⁸ Marco Polo writes of pirates on the westcoast of India who went to sea every year with more than a hundred 'corsair vessels,' taking along their wives and children and staying out the whole summer; their method was to join 20 or 30 of their ships in a sea cordon, with intervals of eight to ten kilometres between each ship, so that they could cover long stretches of water, while sending each other smoke and fire signals when any one of them spotted a merchant ship.¹⁸⁹

These appear to have been part-time pirates; but we are not told what they did the rest of the year. Pires gives another example: the Nodhaki tribe of Baluchis who were 'pirates who go in light boats ... [and] are archers, and as many as two hundred put to sea and rob ... as far as Ormuz.'¹⁹⁰ Such large-scale piratical activity was conducted, it appears from these accounts, over remarkably long distances. And, as remarkably, the pirates themselves, could come from anywhere: there were Malay pirates in Madagascar,¹⁹¹ Habshi pirates in Colombo,¹⁹² and Chinese pirates in the Strait of Malacca.¹⁹³

In the medieval Indian Ocean, pirates of all kinds were specifically associated with rough, indented coasts, creeks with thick screens of

¹⁸⁶ Duarte Barbosa, *II*, pp. 95–96, 199; Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 113; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 32, 149; O. K. Nambiar, *The Kunjalis: Admirals of Calicut* (New York, 1963).

¹⁸⁷ Duarte Barbosa, *II*, pp. 95–96.

¹⁸⁸ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 139; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 184, 232; *TF*, pp. 349–50.

¹⁸⁹ Yule, *Marco Polo*, II, p. 389.

¹⁹⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 30.

¹⁹¹ Kirkman, 'History of the coast of East Africa', p. 110.

¹⁹² H. von Mzik, *Die Reise des Arabers Ibn Battuta durch Indien und China (14. Jahrhundert)* (Hamburg, 1911), p. 367.

¹⁹³ Mills, *Ma Huan*, pp. 10–11, 99–100; Spencer, 'Piracy and Slave Trade', pp. 147, 149.

mangrove, and above all with archipelagoes of small (and not uncommonly uninhabited) islands. As one author put it:

'As surely as spiders abound where there are nooks and corners, so have pirates sprung up wherever there is a nest of islands offering creeks and shallows, headlands, rocks, and reefs-facilities, in short, for lurking, for attack, and for escape.'¹⁹⁴

We know that along the coast of East Africa, with its numerous offshore islands, and generally in the western Indian Ocean, piracy was already widespread in Roman times, but that it increased in the first half of the second millennium. Arabic sources amply testify to the dangers of pirate fleets, called *bīra*, which swept the seas from Cutch and Kathiawar to Sri Lanka, to Makran, to the Persian Gulf, the southern Red Sea, Zanzibar and Socotra.¹⁹⁵ Throughout the Red Sea, coral reefs and islands skirting both coasts for almost 2,000 kilometres favoured piracy among nomads that were equally prone to desert raids, especially in 'Arabia Deserta.'¹⁹⁶ In the Persian Gulf, piracy was also encouraged by the presence of a large number of islands, as well as reefs, and particularly the narrow inlets closed by sandbanks on the flat and isolated Arab shore were favoured hide-outs for pirates.¹⁹⁷ On the barren coasts of Makran and Sind, we again encounter pirates who were also pastoral nomads.¹⁹⁸ Cutch and Kathiawar, Jagat (Dwarka) and islands off the coast of Gujarat such as the snake-infested island of Bayt were notorious for the 'most atrocious' piracy in medieval times.¹⁹⁹ The Konkan, with its narrow and broken coastline with creeks and inlets, was notorious for rampant piracy and forced customs; here it affected particularly the Muslim traffic in horses.²⁰⁰ Similar piratical activities, focusing on the

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Saleeby, *History of Sulu*, p. 50.

¹⁹⁵ E. C. Sachau (transl.), *Alberuni's India* (New Delhi, 1983), I, p. 208; *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 51, 129, 142, 156, 164–6, 169.

¹⁹⁶ Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 5; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 12, 14, 17–19; P. Risso, *Merchants and Faith: Muslim commerce and culture in the Indian Ocean* (Boulder, 1995), p. 53.

¹⁹⁷ Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', p. 120; Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, p. 21; Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 5; A. Wilson, *The Persian Gulf* (London, 1928), pp. 1 ff.; *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 18–19.

¹⁹⁸ *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 129–66; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 30, 32.

¹⁹⁹ Yule, *Marco Polo*, II, pp. 389, 392; *TF*, II, pp. 200–1; *TA*, pp. 259–60.

²⁰⁰ *TF*, pp. 349–50; *Duarte Barbosa*, I, p. 152; II, p. 167, note 1; Risso, *Merchants and Faith*, p. 53; R. Chakravarti, 'Horse Trade and Piracy at Tana (Thana, Maharashtra, India): Gleanings from Marco Polo', *Journal of the Economic and Social*

horse trade, were rife in estuaries of the Canarese coast and of those along the entire westcoast between Goa and Mount Eli, in Malabar, as well.²⁰¹ The 'Malabar pirates' who plundered horsetraders in the fifteenth century, we learn, were all 'Kafirs'.²⁰² In the southeastern waterways of the Ganges delta piracy was common among the Moghs of the still un-Islamic backwoods of Chittagong.²⁰³ Piracy, both by 'Moors' and by 'Heathen' was more or less universal in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, most of all in the 'arc of piracy' which ran from the Strait of Malacca down to Singapore and the Riau-Lingga archipelago, and from there along the northwest coast of Kalimantan to the Sulu islands and the southern Philippines.²⁰⁴ Here there were innumerable islands and creeks, often uninhabited, which afforded ever so many fastnesses.

It is important to note that, even while confined to marginal geographical habitats, piratical activity in the Indian Ocean was fully integrated in the normal life of states. Official sponsorship of piracy by states was universal.²⁰⁵ And the distinction between 'pirates' and licensed 'corsairs' appears, therefore, to have been almost non-existent. Freebooting and smuggling, after all, required a highly developed land base everywhere.²⁰⁶ Ships had to be built, equipped, and manned. Captured and smuggled cargoes had to be sold. Directly and indirectly, in other words, many people shared in and contributed to the lawlessness of piracy.²⁰⁷ The rulers of Hindu and

History of the Orient, xxxiv (1991), pp. 160, 162-3, 167-74; J. Deloche, 'Geographical Considerations in the Localization of Ancient Seaports of India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 20, 4 (1983), p. 442; Yule, *Marco Polo*, II, p. 395.

²⁰¹ G. Bouchon, 'L'évolution de la piraterie sur la côte malabar au cours du xvi^e siècle', in: *L'Asie du Sud à l'époque des Grandes Découvertes* (London, 1987), XII, pp. 745-7; Duarte Barbosa, I, pp. 186-7, and note 1.

²⁰² Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, pp. 53-56; Yule, *Marco Polo*, II, p. 389; Nambiar, *Kunjalis*, I, p. 263; Major, *India*, I, pp. 7, 18-19; III, p. 11; Duarte Barbosa, II, p. 96.

²⁰³ Bouchon and Thomaz, *Voyage*, pp. 134, 311, and note 43. 311.

²⁰⁴ Spencer, 'Piracy in the Indian Archipelago', pp. 581, 583-4, 634; Sopher, *Sea Nomads*, pp. 256, 321, 324-5, 327; Healey, 'Tribes and States', pp. 6, 18; Spencer, 'Piracy and Slave Trade', p. 45; Mills, *Ma Huan*, pp. 10-11, 99-100; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 139, 141, 145-9, 173, 201, 203-4, 221, 226; Saleeby, *History of Sulu*, p. 49; Duarte Barbosa, II, p. 199; N. Tarling, *Piracy and Politics in the Malay World: A Study of British Imperialism in Nineteenth-century South-East Asia* (Melbourne, 1963), pp. 5-8, 15, 101.

²⁰⁵ Spencer, 'Piracy in the Indian Archipelago', p. 581; idem, 'Piracy and Slave Trade', p. 46; Tarling, *Piracy*, pp. 3, 10.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Rozenberg and Birdzell, *How the West Grew Rich*, p. 95.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Muslim states alike afforded protection to pirates, provisioned them, contributed to their equipment, and shared in their booty. Condoned by the state, piracy was an important constituent of a competitive political system which was always in flux, and in many places there was only a vague distinction between trade and piracy, with rulers moving from one to the other with great ease.²⁰⁸ In the Siak chronicle the word *merampas* means both 'to loot' and 'to confiscate' or 'take by law.'²⁰⁹ The preoccupation was not with trade but with wealth, regardless of how it was obtained. In this way it was entirely conceivable that, in Pires' words, 'certain countries of Celates,' such as Purjim and Lingga in Sumatra, were 'obedient to the king of Malacca.'²¹⁰ On the westcoast of India, pirates, taking their wives and children to sea, appear to have enjoyed royal support as well.²¹¹ Pirates of the Canara coast were enlisted in the service of the Bahmanī and Vijayanagara kings to force horse convoys into their ports.²¹² A custom that can hardly be distinguished from piracy and that prevailed in the Konkan (where it was known as 'the law of the Konkan') and other parts of the westcoast of India, as well as on the east-coast, was the right to salvage, i.e. the right of a ruler to loot a ship coming to a port to which it was not originally bound to come, or a ship wrecked anywhere on their coasts, as well as the confiscation of cargoes, and seizure of ships off-course.²¹³ Rulers on the Konkan coast routinely claimed a share in the maritime trade in the form of customs. And rulers of ports in the peninsula could compel merchant ships to come to them by having them hijacked by pirates on the high seas.²¹⁴ In the western Indian Ocean it was not the general practice of pirates to either kill or enslave travelers and merchants.²¹⁵ Pirates on the westcoast of India were more after horses

²⁰⁸ Tarling, *Piracy*, p. 10; V. T. King, *The Peoples of Borneo* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 1993), pp. 24–26; Healey, 'Tribes and States', pp. 4–6, 18; A. C. Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule* (Tucson, 1982), pp. 18–21.

²⁰⁹ Milner, *Kerajaan*, pp. 18–21.

²¹⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, pp. 262, 264.

²¹¹ Basham, 'Notes', p. 64; Yule, *Marco Polo*, II, p. 389; Chakravarti, 'Horse Trade and Piracy', pp. 176–8; L. Varadarajan, 'Konkan Ports and Medieval Trade', *Indica*, 22 (1985), pp. 9–16; *Al-Hind*, II, p. 86.

²¹² Bouchon, 'Evolution de la Piraterie', pp. 745–6.

²¹³ Chakravarti, 'Horse Trade and Piracy', p. 175; S. Digby, 'The Maritime Trade of India', in: T. Raychaudhuri and I. Habib (eds), *The Cambridge History of India, Volume I, c. 1200–c. 1750* (Delhi, 1984), p. 153; Yule, *Marco Polo*, II, pp. 385–6.

²¹⁴ Digby, 'Maritime Trade of India', p. 154.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

and other merchandise than slaves. But in the more thinly populated Malay-Indonesian archipelago piracy was also important as a source of slaves.²¹⁶ Here piracy became a means of supplying scarce labour to the major political and commercial centres (Malacca, Ayudhya, Pasai), generating a flow of people from east to west (especially from the microstates of Irian Jaya, Bali, the Lesser Sunda Islands, and others), and thus creating yet another mechanism for the building of ethnically diverse states, making marauding part of the general political dynamics, and further blurring the distinction between piratical and corsair activity.

According to Marco Polo, Indian pirates brought their plunder to Socotra—on the southern side of the Gulf of Aden—for disposal, and here a market was held where these commodities were brought back into the main currents of Indian Ocean commerce.²¹⁷ Similar islands, with black markets, could be found in most parts of the Indian Ocean where trade was conducted. Jolo was another one, and Sangeang [Foguo], Aru, Arcat, Rupert, among the Indonesian islands.²¹⁸ The *insularity* of islands made them a geographical zone of transition between the settled world and the maritime frontier. In Marco Polo's estimate there were 12,700 islands in the Sea of India; and some of these he describes as 'the Flower of the Indies.'²¹⁹ Taken together, they probably belong more in the frontier than in the settled category, although that would vary with their individual size. In their religious life, the islands and island archipelagoes, while open to influences from the mainland, often retained unorthodox and heretical orientations. Socotra, for instance, in the fifteenth century was inhabited by an heretical Christian community, a branch of the Ethiopian church which was eventually obliterated by Islam; but witchcraft and sorcery have long been associated with Socotra in popular belief, and these beliefs survived.²²⁰ Similarly, the Orang Laut of the Riau archipelago have been known as practitioners of

²¹⁶ Spencer, 'Piracy in the Indian Archipelago', p. 583; idem, 'Piracy and Slave Trade', p. 162; Tarling, *Piracy*, pp. 2, 4; Kling, *Peoples of Borneo*, pp. 24–27; Barnes, *Sea Hunters*, pp. 13–17; Healey, 'Tribes and States', pp. 18–19; A. Reid, *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia* (St. Lucia, 1983).

²¹⁷ Yule, *Marco Polo*, II, p. 407.

²¹⁸ Healey, 'Tribes and States', pp. 18–20; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 203, 226–8; II, p. 262.

²¹⁹ Yule, *Marco Polo*, II, pp. 423–4.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 406–10.

black magic, and the greatest fear of outsiders coming to the islands was that the Orang Laut would bewitch them and induct them into a marriage and a life at sea.²²¹

Attempts were sometimes made to clean up the islands and rid them of pirates.²²² But piracy remained endemic as long as the pirates could be enlisted in the service of states, had secure bases for their operations, and places where they could sell their loot. The history of trade in the medieval Indian Ocean, like in the Mediterranean, is to a considerable degree the history of trading combined with naval conflict, raiding and freebooting, and it generally had a highly armed character.²²³ Even if the people of the sea were known as 'robbers,' they often appear to have been essential in the militarization of coastal kingdoms and their activities generally contributed to the commercialization of the Indian Ocean seaboard, to new forms of urbanization, and hence to higher, more complex, and more monetized forms of social and economic organization.

In this regard it is striking to observe that the medieval centuries which witnessed the rise of pastoral-nomadic power in the arid zone also saw the rise of coastal centres and maritime people—many of them rapidly Islamizing—throughout the Indian Ocean: ports of the Swahili coast of Africa, Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, Cambay, Calicut, Malacca, Ayudhya, Phnom Penh, the coastal city-states of northeast Sumatra, of the Javanese *pasisir* (Gresik, Tuban, Demak, Jakarta, Banten)—all of these, and many others as well, rose to prominence in the first half of the second millennium AD. Throughout the Indian Ocean, this was the beginning of a new age of commerce, a decisive shift of power to trade-based coastal centres and an increase in urbanization on the maritime frontier.²²⁴

²²¹ C. Chou, 'Contesting the Tenure of Territoriality: The Orang Suku Laut', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 153, 4 (1997), pp. 6–5–29.

²²² *TA*, pp. 259–60; *TF*, II, p. 200.

²²³ Naval conflict is abundantly recorded in the Indian Ocean: see e.g. Risso, *Merchants and Faith*, p. 52; Mills, *Ma Huan*, pp. 309–10; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 195, 369–70; J. Deloche, 'Iconographic Evidence on the Development of Boat and Ship Structures in India', in: H. P. Ray and J.-F. Salles (eds), *Tradition and Archaeology: Early Maritime Contacts in the Indian Ocean* (Delhi, 1996), pp. 199–224; Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, p. 147; Digby, 'Maritime Trade of India', p. 152; Basham, 'Notes', p. 64; Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', p. 120; Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 70; *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 164–9; Yule, *Marco Polo*, II, p. 389; *TF*, pp. 349–50, 368; *TF*, II, pp. 188, 201, 203; *TA*, pp. 117–8, 214–6, 246, 259, 278–9. For the Mediterranean, see Rozenberg and Birdzell, *How the West Grew Rich*, p. 94.

²²⁴ As is memorably depicted in an historical novel by Pramoedya Toer, *De Stroom*

These latter cities were close to the sea and, even though they sometimes turned their backs on their own hinterlands, they were open in physical and economic terms, while pluralistic in political terms, and thus characterized by a high degree of unregulated and even lawless competition. The acceptance of Islam by many of the maritime centres was a continuous process lasting from the medieval period to the present. Islam became the connecting link between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf and the westcoast of India, down to Malabar and Sri Lanka, and hence to the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. While the migration of Muslim diaspora merchants from Arabia and Persia to all parts of the Indian Ocean is abundantly documented, the exact significance of the Chinese-Muslim network in the early centuries is not well known. But there appears to have been a slow reinforcement of overseas Chinese communities, whose position in especially the eastern parts of the Indian Ocean was becoming crucial. Trade with China was much more important than that with the Mediterranean.²²⁵ Especially after 1277, when the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan established his power over the coastal provinces of southeastern and southern China, the drain of China's metallic currency towards the Indian Ocean appears to have accelerated.²²⁶ From the thirteenth century, too, the presence of Chinese mercantile communities is attested in Cambodia, and around 1350 they took part in the founding of the new Thai capital of Ayudhya. Ma Huan in his *Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores* shows them to have been numerous in the *pasisir* of Java by the beginning of the fifteenth century, and quite committed to Islam.²²⁷ And the Chinese were still present on the Malabar coast in the fifteenth century—here however they would disappear soon afterwards, as they did from all parts of the Indian Ocean to the west of Malacca. In the early fifteenth century, the Ming government still adopted an aggressive overseas policy, and it looked for a while as if China would emerge as the supreme power in the 'Western Ocean.' A series of seven naval expe-

uit het Noorden (Original title *Arus Balik* (1979); Dutch translation by H. Maier, Breda, 1995). For an historical analysis of the late-medieval and early modern transformation of 'the lands below the winds', see Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*.

²²⁵ Yule, *Marco Polo, II*, p. 235; *Al-Hind, II*, pp. 34–42.

²²⁶ W. W. Rockhill, 'Notes on the relations and trade of China with the Eastern Archipelago and the coast of the Indian Ocean during the fourteenth century, Part I', *T'oung Pao*, XV (1914), pp. 418–66.

²²⁷ Mills, *Ma Huan*, esp. pp. 86 ff.

ditions was undertaken, the first in 1405, under the admiralship of the Chinese-Muslim eunuch Chwang Ho, which reached Indonesia, Malacca, Sri Lanka, Calicut, Hormuz, Aden, and Malindi, among other places. But a stream of failures, withdrawals and recessions followed. Overseas expeditions were suspended, and the Chinese ceased to be a major power in the Indian Ocean altogether. Chinese Muslims, however, figured in the spread of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago, especially in the Sulu area.

The people to whom we have referred as People of the Sea and Sea Nomads—Orang Laut, Moken and Sama-Bajau—and whose mode of adaptation appears to have been unique to the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, were instrumental in the formation of numerous states and statelets, linking together the emerging courts, subsidiary chiefs and a developing peasantry.²²⁸ Throughout the area, the sea nomads emerged, together with a variety of related coastal and strand peoples, from a common cultural matrix. Like pastoral nomads and other mobile groups, the sea nomads who propped up the earliest historical states in these eastern extensions of the Indian Ocean seem to have been regarded as semi-pariahs. Even so, like the seafaring people in the Sulu archipelago, the Orang Laut who were concentrated along the southern approaches of the Strait of Malacca, were at a major crossroads of maritime commerce. They were active in the primary arena of Malay political history and have played centrally important roles in the naval power and communicative links on which the hegemony of successive Malay states was based, in a zone of otherwise sparse population.

There can hardly be a better illustration of this fact than the account of the role of the Orang Laut or 'Celates', 'People of the Strait,' in the founding by Paramcura of the fifteenth-century entrepôt of Malacca. In Tomé Pires' version:

'There lived in Malacca . . . the Celates, who are corsairs in small light craft . . . they are men who go out pillaging in their boats and fish, and are sometimes on land and sometimes at sea, of whom there are a large number in our time . . . when Paramcura fled from Palembang they followed his company . . . Paramcura made them mandarins—which means nobles—

²²⁸ Sather, 'Sea and Shore People'; Hogan, 'Men of the Sea'; Pelras, 'Notes'; Saleeby, *History of Sulu*; Kiefer, 'Tausig Polity'; Sather, 'Sea Nomads'; Sopher, *Sea Nomads*.

both them and their sons and wives forever . . . Paramcura's son endeavoured with his father to populate Malacca as much as he could . . . People began to come from the Aru side and from other places, men such as Celates robbers but also fishermen, in such numbers that three years after his coming Malacca was a place with two thousand inhabitants, and Siam was sending rice there . . . and some rich Moorish merchants moved from Pase to Malacca, Parsees, as well as Bengalees and Arabian Moors . . . Trade began to grow greatly . . .'²²⁹

Malacca rose to such importance that by the early sixteenth century Pires held out that 'Whoever is lord of Malacca has his hand on the throat of Venice.'²³⁰

²²⁹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 232-41.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

CHAPTER IV

POST-NOMADIC EMPIRES

Nomads have never been able to establish empires in the monsoon climate of Hind. The Shākas, Kushānas, Hephthalites, and Turks who achieved power across the Hindu-Kush are perhaps best characterized as 'post-nomadic' peoples, with origins in the steppes, but no longer practicing pastoral nomadism as their primary or even secondary occupation.¹ In the thirteenth century, Mongol nomads again failed to establish themselves on any permanent basis beyond the western periphery of the subcontinent.² Most Mongol raids, at that time, were comparatively small, confined to the northwest frontier, the Panjab and Sind, and constrained by insufficient pasture land beyond these regions.

THE MONGOL PROBLEM

The Mongols who invaded Hind in the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were overwhelmingly offshoots of the Chaghatay, an Ulus which was still nomadic and which had remained unresponsive to the urban Muslim culture of *Mā warā' an-nahr* and eastern Khurasan (where they had established control by 1288).³ The Chaghatay occupation of Bīnbān and the Koh-i-Jūd (on the Indus and the Jhelum respectively) was accompanied by the transformation of large tracts of agricultural land into pasture, in an attempt to provide a military base which could sustain a much larger Mongol cavalry.⁴ From these strategically located areas, raids continued to be launched into the northern plains, and it was from here that the Mongols were able to mobilize a measure of support from among

¹ *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 52–76.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 202–8, 381.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 206; P. Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: a political and military history* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 114–5, 117, 125–35, 140–7, 217–37.

⁴ Cf. *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 201, 206–7.

local Hindu chiefs (such as the Kokhars). This situation lasted up to the second decade of the fourteenth century, when the Mongol bases in the Koh-i-Jūd were destroyed by Ghazi Malik, the renowned frontier warden and future founder of the Tughlug dynasty in Delhi.⁵ Mongol raids also continued to be initiated, in the first two decades of the fourteenth century, from among the nomadic warbands that were brought into the borderlands between Hind and Iran under Nögödar, the nephew of Chaghatay.⁶ But the Nögödari raids were even more localized initiatives (in which apparently some groups of Baluchis were swept up as well) and probably affected only lower Sind.

Mongols would typically operate in hordes, and, for all their elusiveness in battle, they would not detach 'even ten horses' away from their main body when on campaign.⁷ Mobility was therefore essential. Because of the fodder requirements, in Hind a large Mongol horde, with all its reserve horses, could only survive on the move. Between 1292 and 1316 Mongol hordes crossed the Indus at least eight times, surrounded and besieged Delhi twice with huge forces, but in the end always withdrew in great haste, more often than not plundering towns and villages, with indiscriminate slaughter on all sides. The most important of these campaigns were under the leadership of descendants of Chingiz Khan and other princes of 'Khurāsān', 'Turkistān', 'Mā warā' an-nahr', or 'Mughalistān.' The Indo-Islamic sources are somewhat vague about the exact provenance of these invading hordes, but they establish beyond doubt that they consisted, apart from a certain number of Turks, Tajiks, Afghans, and even Indians, largely of troops recruited from among the Mongol nomads, from among people who would return to a pastoral-nomadic lifestyle between campaigns.⁸ The Mongol hordes, resembling 'ants and locusts,' are counted in tumans (units of 10,000): two or three tumans in this year, ten to fifteen tumans in another, sometimes twenty tumans (as in 1297 A.D.), and more than that during the largest invasion of Hind ever conducted, in 1328 or 1329, under Tarmashirin, when 'the whole area from Siri to the Jūd hills became a military

⁵ See also *TFS*, pp. 322–3.

⁶ Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 123–4.

⁷ *TFS*, p. 256.

⁸ *TMS*, pp. 64, 72–4; *TF*, pp. 94, 102; *KF*, p. 103; *TFS*, pp. 320–1.

camp.⁹ As genuine nomads, the Mongol invaders routinely brought their women and children along, and it is not clear to what extent these, and other campfollowers (including slaves) are included in the figures.¹⁰ Women and children rode horses, but rather than participating in combat directly, they served logistical purposes, staying prepared to take down the tents instantaneously. It seems plausible that they were not counted as part of the tumans. Women and (very young) children were, in any case, not normally treated as combatants by their Muslim opponents; if captured they were sold into slavery in Delhi or more distant markets, whereas the Mongol combatants (if they were not given the option to convert and become 'New Muslims') were often cruelly executed in public darbars, where platforms and turrets were constructed with their skulls.¹¹ The Mongol nomads were regarded as different from Muslims not merely because of their lack of urbanity and because of the general barbarity of their massacres ('wherever their feet went, desolation followed')¹² but also because of the special barbarity of disregarding gender and religion among their enemies.¹³

If the scale of Mongol invasions in the Panjab and on the north-west frontier peaked by the end of the third decade of the fourteenth century, increasingly effective frontier defence (in which 'Indian warriors' were now also employed on a large scale, next to 'the armies of Islam') and the strengthening of fortifications, combined with the outbreak of Mongol internecine warfare in *Mā warā' an-nahr*, largely put an end to the invasions for the next sixty years.¹⁴

⁹ *FS*, pp. 444-7, 246-61; *TFS*, pp. 218, 254-6, 259-61, 300-2, 320-1; *KF*, pp. 103-4; *TF*, pp. 94, 102, 134.

¹⁰ *TFS*, pp. 218, 254, 321-2; *TF*, pp. 94, 102-3, 115-6; *FS*, pp. 241-2, 246, 280-1, 294-8.

¹¹ *TF*, p. 102 gives an exceptional instance in which Mongol women and children were not spared.

¹² *FS*, p. 247.

¹³ Cf. *TFSA*, p. 119.

¹⁴ *TFS*, pp. 218, 250, 254-6, 259-69, 300-2, 320-3, 340, 387, 449, 601-2; *FS*, pp. 202-8, 241-2, 246-61, 276-7, 280-1, 283-4, 293-8, 310-4, 394-8, 444-7; *KF*, pp. 33-41, 103-4, 113; *TMS*, pp. 64, 72-74, 101, 113, 127, 133; *TF*, pp. 94, 102-3, 115-6, 130, 134; *TFSA*, pp. 48-49; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah, III*, p. 202; A. Ahmad, 'Mongol pressure in an alien land', *Central Asiatic Journal*, VI (1961), pp. 188-9; I. H. Siddiqui, 'Politics and conditions in the territories under the occupation of Central Asian rulers in North-western India—13th & 14th centuries', *Central Asiatic Journal*, XXVII, (1983), pp. 296-302; P. Jackson, 'The Mongols and the Delhi Sultanate of Muhammad Tughluq (1325-1351)', *Central Asiatic Journal*, XIX (1975), pp. 133-42.

We can observe a similar chronology in Kashmir; here too the worst Mongol attacks were over by the third decade of the fourteenth century. In Kashmir, however, the Mongol armies appear to have been able to prolong their stay thanks to the mixed pastoral-and-agricultural economy of the country. Here too grain-producing fields could be turned into pasture for horses. Invaded three times in the thirteenth century, and temporarily occupied for years after the first two invasions (possibly after the third as well), in or around 1323 the country was entered by a Mongol army of six or seven tumans under Dalacha (Diljū), who was probably a noyon of the Chaghatays.¹⁵ Dalacha invaded Kashmir through Ladakh and the Zojī La pass, and spent eight months in the valley, burning down its villages and towns, massacring its people, and selling off numerous of its inhabitants as slaves.¹⁶ Jonaraja writes that 'Kashmir became almost like a region before the creation, a vast field with few men, without food, and full of grass.'¹⁷ Dalacha's invasion proved to be a turning point in the history of Kashmir and indirectly contributed to the establishment of Muslim rule there.¹⁸

Amīr Tīmūr, the last of the great nomad leaders, succeeded in 1398 in briefly occupying Delhi.¹⁹ A Barlās Turk, whose father was an early convert to Islam, and born in 1336, Tīmūr still grew up in a world of nomad power, a world in which warfare was endemic, fortunes changed quickly, and in which personality and opportunity

¹⁵ *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 207–8; G. M. D. Sufi, *Islamic Culture in Kashmir* (New Delhi, 1979), p. 48; A. Ahmad, 'Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir', *Central Asiatic Journal*, XXIII (1979), pp. 4–5; K. Jahn, 'A note on Kashmir and the Mongols', *Central Asiatic Journal*, II (1956), pp. 176–80; K. R. Pandit (transl.), *A Chronicle of Mediaeval Kashmir* (Calcutta, 1991), p. 17.

¹⁶ Sufi, *Islamic Culture in Kashmir*, p. 49; Pandit, *Chronicle of Mediaeval Kashmir*, p. 17.

¹⁷ Sadhu, *Medieval Kashmir*, p. 28, and see pp. 27, 29.

¹⁸ A. Q. Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir, from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century* (Varanasi, 1972), pp. 7–8.

¹⁹ On Tīmūr, see B. F. Manz, *The rise and rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge, 1989); idem, 'Temür and the problem of a conqueror's legacy', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3d series, 8, 1 (April, 1998), pp. 21–41; Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 313–4; T. W. Lentz and G. D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles, 1989); W. M. Thackston (ed. and transl.), *A Century of Princes* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); H. Hookhan, *Tamburlaine the Conqueror* (London, 1962); Ch. Stewart (transl.), *The Malfūzat Timury or Autobiographical Memoirs of the Moghul Emperor Timur, written in the Jagtay Turkey Language, turned into Persian by Abu Talib Hussyny* (Or. 1830; Lahore, 1975); *Malfūzāt-i-amīr tīmūr*: BM, Or. 158; Davy, *Political and Military Institutes of Tamerlane*; Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, III, pp. 394–477; *ZN*, II, pp. 18–139.

rather than institutions were crucial.²⁰ Having started his career as a petty brigand, stealing sheep, equipped (by his own description) with nothing but supreme self-confidence and a restless disposition, he was soon able to subdue all of *Mā warā' an-nahr*, compel the nomad hordes to conform to his regulations, and ascend the throne of Samarqand in 1369.²¹ In his memoirs Tīmūr describes himself as the equal of Chingiz Khan:

'Chingiz Khan was an inhabitant of the desert, who by violence and the force of his sword formerly gained a superiority over the Musulmans, at present the sword of the Amir Timur is not inferior to what Chingiz Khan's sword was . . .'²²

When Tīmūr embarked in 1360 on his conquests—which were in actual fact to rival those of Chingiz Khan both in extent and ferocity—the Mongol empire had ceased to exist, and the fragmented Mongol khanates in Iran and *Mā warā' an-nahr* were no longer ruled by descendants of Chingiz Khan.²³ The Chaghatays were now divided into a western and an eastern branch, and the former Ilkhanid realm of Iran was controlled by numerous dynasties of Mongol, as well as of Turkic, Iranian and Arab origin.²⁴ With the Chingisid line in decline but still a powerful source of legitimacy, Tīmūr, without a royal pedigree of his own, boosted his position by passing himself off as an amir of a Chingisid puppet king and by acquiring the title of *güregen* or royal son-in-law (which also signifies 'great prince') by virtue of his marriage to a Chingisid princess.²⁵ Beginning and ending his life as a leader of nomads, Tīmūr thus clearly saw himself as part of a Turko-Mongol tradition of nomadic conquerors, which included Chingiz Khan and Tarmashirin.²⁶ But since in Tīmūr's time the settled and nomadic worlds had become much more closely integrated, he was not just a nomad ruler; unlike Chingiz Khan, he could exploit certain settled populations as well.²⁷ Tīmūr succeeded

²⁰ Cf. Manz, *Tamerlane*, p. 19.

²¹ Stewart, *Malfuzat*, pp. 48–49, 53, 58; Manz, *Tamerlane*, pp. 16, 18–19.

²² Elliot and Dowson, *History of India, III*, p. 396.

²³ Manz, *Tamerlane*, pp. 1, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114; Stewart, *Malfuzat*, p. xvi.

²⁶ Both of whom he often refers to in his descriptions of the campaigns he undertook, particularly in the Indus region (e.g. Elliot and Dowson, *History of India, III*, pp. 408–9, 412; *ZN, II*, pp. 99–102).

²⁷ Manz, *Tamerlane*, pp. 12, 14.

in the conquest of Delhi where his Chaghatay predecessors had failed, because of the much greater resources of revenue and manpower which he could obtain in areas outside the Chaghatay realm, from nomadic as well as settled populations. This allowed him to build up a more formidable warmachine, at a time when Delhi's resources were sharply diminished.²⁸ Still, in his short-lived conquest of Delhi, Tīmūr encountered the same obstacles as his nomadic predecessors.

Attracted by the gold of Hind, and aiming to wage 'religious war' against the infidel Hindus, Tīmūr took the route from Samarqand through 'the country of the Afghans' and Badakhshan, then along the western edge of Kafiristan (into which he made a detour), to Kabul, in a season when the rivers to the north of the Hindū-Kush were fordable and the passes through the mountains north of Kabul were sufficiently snow free.²⁹ He had to leave Kabul as soon as his horses had consumed all the fodder available in the valley, which, according to British army reports, could sustain 30,000 cavalry for a month, at most two.³⁰ From here, his route went through a pass between the Bolan and the Khyber, entering the valley opposite of Multan, or somewhat to the north, a choice of direction that may have been related to the fact that the powindas had already taken most of the fodder available on the other routes. Tīmūr's route through the Panjab, with its shifting rivers, has been very difficult to reconstruct. Different texts present different itineraries. But it appears that here, again, the availability of fodder dictated the line of march. Tīmūr, departing from Mongol practice, may have broken up his army of 90,000 cavalry in three or more separate columns which simultaneously crossed the entire Panjab. Receiving reinforcements along the way, these army units still needed to plunder an enormous number of granaries, while collecting herds of cattle and buffaloes at the same time. As was usual with Mongol armies, entire towns were ransacked, their populations massacred or dispersed. Tīmūr's forces then re-united just northwest of Delhi, defeated the Sultan, plundered the city for five days, and killed huge numbers of 'infidel' prisoners. With the accumulated booty and a mul-

²⁸ Cf. Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 313–4.

²⁹ For the route through Afghanistan, see especially Masson, *Narrative of Various Journeys*, I, pp. 198–202; III, pp. 162–3.

³⁰ I am indebted for this and some of the subsequent information to Prof. James Hoover.

titude of captives, he then marched back along the Ganges, the Siwaliks, and the foothills of the Himalayas, conducting short forays into the hills to attack forts and loot temples, everywhere leaving chaos and pestilence in his wake. Here he came close to losing his army due to fatigue and exhaustion, in a final demonstration that the ecological conditions of Hind posed insuperable limits to nomadic penetration. Tīmūr had to keep his army on the move as there were few places where he could find sufficient water and forage for more than a few days, and he had to get out of the country before the beginning of the monsoon.

As it happened, this was the last major nomadic incursion across the Indus. After Tīmūr, there were only small forces of Mongols operating on the northwest frontier, and as far as Sind and Multan, but not beyond Lahore. We get glimpses of these final raids in the chronicles of 1423, 1430 and 1433.³¹

THE INDO-ISLAMIC EMPIRES

a) *The empire of Delhi*

The Indo-Islamic empires of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were essentially the creations not of nomads but of post-nomadic elites who were immigrants from the arid zone and who had turned their back on the pastoral nomadism of their ancestors. Numerous other groups cooperated with them on the more subordinate levels.

The roots of these post-nomadic empires of Hind go back as far as the late tenth and eleventh centuries. The earliest Muslim armies that had penetrated into the Indian river plains had been under Turkish Mamlūk leadership and consisted largely of cavalries which were recruited from the pastoral-nomadic populations of Central Asia, *Mā warā' an-nahr* and *Khurāsān*. These had already abandoned their pastoral nomadism or were in the process of doing so, when the first permanent Indo-Islamic states began to take shape in the Panjab and on the northwest frontier. Other populations were involved in this process already then, particularly from the area which

³¹ *TMS*, pp. 201–2, 210, 230; *TF*, pp. 165, 167–8.

is now Afghanistan—Afghans, Khalajīs, Ghūrīs, eastern Tājiks—and later Mongol converts and large numbers of fugitives from Mongol-occupied Muslim lands, as well as Indians, and some Arabs and Habshis, in addition to others.³² In all cases, the immigrant Muslims did not arrive in tribal formations of nomads complete with their herds. Rather than by widespread nomadization by Turko-Mongol peoples of the type that occurred in Iran and elsewhere, in Hind post-nomadic elite-formation and military organization was sustained by immigrant individual and groups of warriors who left their herds and their pastoral-nomadic lifestyle behind forever.

What these people had in common was, above all, their origin in the arid zone, among pastoral-nomadic or mixed pastoral-nomadic and agricultural populations. Converts to Islam, in India the nobility among them were referred to by the generic name of 'Khurāsānians.' The Russian merchant and traveler Nikitin, for example, wrote in 1470 AD that 'the rulers and nobles of India are all Khurasanians.'³³ Ibn Battuta, in the fourteenth century, explained that the term 'Khurāsānians' denoted 'foreigners' (*ghurabā*) who immigrated to al-Hind—overland or by sea—and were absorbed in the Muslim ruling elite.³⁴ Whether they came from Anatolia (Rūm), Iraq, Syria, Egypt, the Maghrib, Ghazna, Khwarazm, or, in effect, from Khurāsān, all (elite) foreigners fell within this broad category.³⁵ Many of the Mongol amirs were included in it as well. It is clear that the number of Mongol amirs and warriors in Hind in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries grew much larger than it had been in the thirteenth century. But these were 'New Muslims,' and are perhaps best characterized as a kind of 'military converts,' while they certainly were no longer pastoral nomads.³⁶ The exact extent to which later-generation Indo-Islamic rulers and nobles were the offspring of Indian wives and concubines is hidden from our view, but we know this to have been common, and it adds yet another dimension to the con-

³² Cf. *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 163 ff.

³³ Major, *India*, III, p. 12.

³⁴ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 98, 144.

³⁵ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 144.

³⁶ Garrett pointed at the importance of 'military conversion,' suggesting that it was the most common form of conversion and identity formation in the context of the Indian military labour market (cf. D. H. A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: the ethnohistory of the military labour market of Hindustan, 1450–1850* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 57–58, 67).

cept of 'post-nomadism'.³⁷ Furthermore, we should not overlook the fact that some Indo-Islamic dynasties were in fact founded by Hindu converts rather than post-nomadic 'Khurāsānians.' The founder of the Gujarat dynasty, Zafar Khan Muzaffar, for example, was a Khatri convert.³⁸ And the Nizam Shahi dynasty of Ahmadnagar was founded by the converted son of a brahman of Vijayanagara.³⁹ These, however, appear to have been major exceptions.

The centuries of Turkish Mamlūk rule were brought to a close by the *Khalajīs*. Where these came from has been a matter of some debate. Later historians have sometimes presented both the founder of the Khalajī dynasty of Delhi (1290–1320) and the founder of the Khalajī dynasty of Malwa (1436–1531) as descendants of Qālij Khān, vulgarly called Khālīj Khān, the son-in-law of Chingiz Khan. But this is an entirely spurious genealogy.⁴⁰ Already the Arab geographers refer to certain groups of pastoral nomads of eastern Afghanistan, of the plateaux of Kabul and Bust, as 'Khalaj Turks'.⁴¹ And the Khalajīs are frequently mentioned in a military capacity, alongside Afghans, in the histories of the Ghaznavids, Ghurids and Slave Kings.⁴² Although they were not Turks, they may have absorbed the ethnic remains of earlier Shaka, Kushana and Hephthalite invasions, and become Turkicized later on. Their name derives from Khalaj, the area on both sides of the Helmand river, including the Garmsir

³⁷ In the thirteenth-century Sultanate of Delhi, Turkish slaves attempted as much as possible to remain endogamous, but we know that they also took women from the native Indian population and that some of the Slave Kings of Delhi, in effect, had Indian mothers (*Al-Hind*, II, pp. 195–6). In 1316 a six-year old son of the late 'Alā' ad-Dīn Khalajī was installed on the Delhi throne for a few months, whose mother was a Hindu princess (*FS*, pp. 335, 342–6). It has been suggested that the Qarauna Turks were the products of unions of Mongols and Indian women, and hence that Ghiyāth ad-Dīn Tughluq's mother was Indian, possibly a Jat (*Al-Hind*, II, p. 209; *TF*, p. 130; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Im Batoutah*, III, pp. 201–2). Muhammad bin Tughluq was related by blood ties 'to all Indians' (*FS*, p. 409). And Firūz Shah Tughluq's mother was a Bhatti of Dipalpur (*TFSA*, pp. 37–40). In the fifteenth century, Afghan rulers in India married into Hindu clans as well, but there was also opposition against it (N. Roy (transl.), *Niamatullah's History of the Afghans, Part I* (Calcutta, 1958), p. xxiv). More generally, the role of Indian women, who were not converted or recent converts, in the imperial and noble harems is likely to have been downplayed in the chronicles.

³⁸ S. C. Misra, *The rise of Muslim power in Gujarat: a history of Gujarat from 1298–1442* (Bombay, 1963), pp. 137–8.

³⁹ *TF*, II, p. 93; *TA*, p. 136.

⁴⁰ As Ferishta points out (*TF*, pp. 88–89).

⁴¹ *Al-Hind*, II, p. 70.

⁴² *TF*, pp. 88–89, 117–8, 137–8, 146, 152, 190, 193, 259.

of Zamindawar, in what is now Afghanistan.⁴³ They later assimilated within the tribal category of Ghilzai Afghans, and adopted the Afghan language of Pashtu.⁴⁴ The same people seem to have moved beyond their early habitat of Khalaj, although it is not clear when and how. Possibly this occurred in the thirteenth century, in the context of Afghan migration from the Koh-i-Sulayman to the east, north and southwest.⁴⁵ Charles Masson, in the early nineteenth century, describes the Khalajīs as ‘a great Turki tribe’ and ‘a mixed race’ that called itself Afghans and spoke Pashtu, and that, in his time, occupied the principal portion of the country between Qandahar and Ghazna, between Farra and Herat, as well as between Kabul and Jalalabad, and he also writes that they were ‘exceedingly numerous’ to the east of Ghazna, in the province of Zurmat.⁴⁶ The Khalajīs between Qandahar and Ghazna comprised the great families of the Ohtak and Thoki, whom Masson regarded as most probably ‘of Turki descent,’ and the Terekis and Andaris, whom he thought might be ‘of Turki descent’ as well.⁴⁷ Masson further observed that the Khalajīs of his time were both an agricultural and a pastoral people, dwelling in villages and castles as well as in tents, and that they were ‘wealthy in flocks,’ but without manufactures except of rough articles for domestic use made from wool and camel-hair.⁴⁸ He thought they were

‘a remarkably fine race of men . . . brave and warlike, but have a sternness of disposition amounting to ferocity in the generality of them, and their brutal manners are, unfortunately, encouraged by the hostility existing between them and their neighbours . . .’⁴⁹

While many Khalajīs had been participants in the Ghaznavid and Ghurid campaigns in Hind, and one Khalajī officer, Muhammad bin Bakhtyar, had established a short-lived and pseudo-independent Khalajī principality in Bengal between 1204 and 1227, no Khalajīs appear to have ranked among the higher nobility in Delhi itself until

⁴³ *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 116, 137.

⁴⁴ *Al-Hind*, II, p. 116.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Al-Hind*, II, p. 169.

⁴⁶ Masson, *Narrative of Various Journeys*, II, pp. 204, 207, 212.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 204, 207.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

the reign of Balban.⁵⁰ Firuz Khalajī, the later Jalāl ad-Dīn, founder of the Khalajī dynasty of Delhi, with his clan following, entered Balban's service as a Mongol frontier warden in an area which included parts of the Khalajī homeland, Ghazna, Kurraman, Binban, and the Koh-i-Jūd.⁵¹ He did not have a single 'Badshah' among his ancestors, and, after his rise to the throne, he at first gave out to have regarded the Delhi empire as the property of Balban and the latter's Turkish followers.⁵² Coming after a long period of Turkish-Mamluk rule, the accession to power of the Khalajīs precipitated a legitimacy crisis, both among the population of Delhi and among the existing nobility (among the latter with some delay).⁵³ A conspiracy to restore a Turkish relative of Balban to the throne failed to bear fruit but did reveal an animosity which was directed against the Khalajīs as a group rather than against a single ruler—contemporary historians, in effect, clearly distinguish the Khalajīs from Turks.⁵⁴ In no part of al-Hind would Turkish mamluks ever rise to the throne again, and during the reign of the Khalajī dynasty in Delhi they were entirely phased out for some time. The Khalajī dynasty massively promoted its fellow Khalajī tribesmen, particularly family members, while promoting the Afghans to higher ranks as well.⁵⁵

The Khalajī dynasty is best known for the exploits of 'Alā' ad-Dīn Khalajī (1296–1316). Conquering Chitor and other key fortresses, 'Alā' ad-Dīn Khalajī subjected Hindūstān 'up to the sea,' and put it through a landrevenue reform and general administrative overhaul that allowed him to strengthen his military and effectively deal with the intensifying Mongol threat.⁵⁶ Mongol pressure was deflected to

⁵⁰ *Al-Hind, II*, p. 259; S. B. P. Nigam, *Nobility under the Sultans of Delhi, A.D. 1206–1398* (Delhi, 1968), pp. 52–53; I. H. Siddiqui, 'Rise of the Afghan Nobility under the Lodi Sultans (1451–1526)', *Medieval India Quarterly*, IV (1961), pp. 114–5; idem, 'Nobility under the Khalji Sultans', *Islamic Culture* (January, 1963), pp. 52–66.

⁵¹ Siddiqui, 'Politics and Conditions', pp. 292–3.

⁵² *TFS*, pp. 175, 178.

⁵³ *TFS*, p. 175; *TF*, p. 89; *Al-Hind, II*, pp. 161, 197.

⁵⁴ *TFS*, pp. 181–2, 184–5, 190.

⁵⁵ Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 83–84, 171, 173–4; I. H. Siddiqui, 'The Afghans and their emergence in India as ruling elite during the Delhi Sultanate Period', *Central Asiatic Journal*, XXVI (1982).

⁵⁶ *TFS*, pp. 262, 269, 272–83, 288, 299; *FS*, pp. 261–8, 294; *KF*, pp. 37–41; *TMS*, pp. 68–80. For a general survey of the Khalajī period, see K. S. Lal, *History of the Khaljis* (1950; revised edition, New Delhi, 1980). For more background to all dynasties discussed in this chapter, see R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *The Delhi Sultanate* (Bombay, 1980); C. E. Bosworth, *The Islamic Dynasties* (Edinburgh, 1967); H. Nelson Wright, *The Coinage and Metrology of the Sultans of Dehli* (New Delhi, 1974).

some degree by the dynasty's heavy reliance on Mongol military converts, 'New Muslims,' who however proved very fickle in their loyalties and prone to apostasy. Already in 1292, we read, some Mongol commanders, amongst which a grandson of Chingiz Khan, were taken prisoner when they invaded with a large force, and these were given an opportunity to stay in India and convert to Islam.⁵⁷ With their followers and wives and children they were brought into the city of Delhi and provided with houses and allowances, but 'the climate did not agree with [some of] them nor did their city homes, so they departed with their families back to their own country,' while some of the others, perhaps some four thousand families, decided to stay, and these were called 'New Muslims.'⁵⁸ Military events throughout the provinces of the empire of Delhi, as far south as Ma'bar, were dominated, in these years, by such New Muslims of Mongol origin, which typically operated in effective units of one to three tumans.⁵⁹ The Khalajīs, in addition, relied on a more heterogeneous following with obscure origins outside the subcontinent, and in their drive to the south, into Malwa, the Deccan and the Peninsula, they relied above all on Indian Mamluks and eunuchs, which were given very high ranks; the latter were not necessarily converts at all, proved even more unreliable than 'New Muslims,' and led in the end to the undoing of the dynasty.⁶⁰

Like the Khalajīs, the dynasty that sat on the throne of Delhi for almost a century after it, the *Tughluqs* (1320–1414), had a typically post-nomadic origin. Its founder, Ghiyāth ad-Dīn Tughluq (1320–25) may well have been in the entourage of one of the many convert Mongol amirs that arrived in India under the Khalajīs. Amir Khusrau proposes that he was 'a nomad (*āwāra marde*) who arrived in the reign of Jalāl ad-Dīn Khalajī (1290–96),' whereas 'Afīf relates that the two Tughluq brothers came 'from the country of Khurāsān to Delhi' in the reign of 'Alā' ad-Dīn Khalajī, and yet a third contemporary author says that he was from 'among the Turks known as *al-qarauna*, who inhabited the mountains between Sind and the

⁵⁷ *TFS*, p. 218; *TF*, p. 94.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *TFS*, pp. 252–3, 273, 283, 335–6; *FS*, pp. 244–5, 288–90, 297; *TMS*, p. 75; *KF*, p. 51.

⁶⁰ *TF*, pp. 123–6; *FS*, pp. 218, 356–80; *TFS*, pp. 381–2, 390–3, 396–7, 399–400, 402–23; *TMS*, pp. 85–87; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 200.

country of the Turks,' while Ferishta, on the basis of enquiries made much later at Lahore, advanced the idea that he was the offspring of a Turki slave of Balban and a Jat woman.⁶¹ Like the founder of the Khalajī dynasty, Ghiyāth ad-Dīn Tughluq was a celebrated Mongol frontier warden, and, in his rise to the throne, was supported by his own kinsmen, by the Kokhars, and by many of the frontier fighters, who are described as mostly people from the *iqḷm-i-bālā* or 'Upper Country': 'Ghuzz, Turks, and Mongols of Rūm and Rūs . . . Tajiks from Khurāsān of pure stock.'⁶² The same people, but more of them, from the Upper Country, and from among the Khalajīs, supported Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325–51), the second and most notable ruler of the dynasty, whose efforts to create and expand an Indo-Islamic imperial elite went far beyond those of any of his predecessors.⁶³

Up to the early reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq, previously made territorial gains were consolidated and extended further in the South, in Bengal and Orissa, and elsewhere, 'up to the Sea of Oman.'⁶⁴ Muhammad bin Tughluq was acutely aware of the problem of distance in the vastly expanded and now almost subcontinental imperial network of provincial capitals, garrisons, fortresses, and tribute-paying Hindu chiefs and kings. He considerably improved the communication links with the South by expanding the postal runner facilities, and attempted to make Deogīr-Daulatabad the new *dār al-mulk*, considering it to be strategically better located than Delhi, between north and south.⁶⁵ He successfully repelled major Mongol attacks, at the cost of causing excessive hardship among the peasantry of the Doab through overtaxation, and even made an attempt to take an offensive role against the Mongols in Khurasan, culminating in a disastrous campaign in this direction through the Pamir mountains.⁶⁶

To garrison his expanding empire, Muhammad bin Tughluq again resorted to the use of mamluks, especially Turks in what appear to

⁶¹ Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, p. 178; *TFS*, p. 36; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 201–2; *TF*, p. 130.

⁶² S. H. Faridabadi, *Tughluqnāma of Amir Khusrau* (Aurangabad, 1933), p. 84; Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 179–181.

⁶³ Cf. Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, p. 182; *FS*, p. 463.

⁶⁴ *TFS*, pp. 446–54; *TF*, p. 134.

⁶⁵ *TMS*, pp. 98–99; *TFS*, pp. 473–4.

⁶⁶ *TFS*, pp. 473, 476–7; *TF*, p. 134; *FS*, pp. 441–2.

be unprecedented numbers, as also a certain number of Habshis and Indians.⁶⁷ Among the *ahl al-Hind* in Muhammad bin Tughluq's service we also find titled nobles of non-servile origin, Muslims as well as non-Muslims. At court these were vastly outnumbered by people denoted as 'Foreigners' or 'Khurāsānians,' the procurement of which became the highest priority.⁶⁸ The latter all belonged to an elite with at least some recognizable characteristics, even though they came from virtually every corner of the Islamic world: Ghazna, Badakhshan, Samarqand, Bukhara, Tirmidh, Khwarazm, Rum, Khurasan, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, the Maghreb, Yaman, Persia, Granada, and Arabia are mentioned among their homelands. With their official positions, according to rank, they received sufficient wealth, mansions, and other favours, to allow them a noble lifestyle. Muhammad bin Tughluq's liberality in this regard became proverbial. The Khurasanians, however, were not allowed to leave al-Hind again, on pain of death. They could only remit articles, slaves, gold and silver, paper and books, and other items, 'back to Khurasan.'⁶⁹ Still, their pampered position and preferential treatment at the court of Muhammad bin Tughluq caused great resentment among the Indians.

The Khurasanian immigrant nobility, traveling in small groups, were a mere trickle next to the waves of 'mountain Afghans,' Turks, and Mongol converts assembling under what came to be known as 'amīr jadīda' ('new amīrs') or 'amīr sadagān' (lit. 'commanders of one hundred'), which together came to constitute a military class with an ethnic identity as blurred as that of the 'Khurasanian' nobility but much larger and often operating in groups of several tumans.⁷⁰ The integrity of the imperial structure was already lost. Just as Muhammad bin Tughluq's liberality came to be outdone by newly emerging provincial dynasties who on their own account 'sent emissaries to the Turks, Afghans and Khurasanians and got them in very

⁶⁷ *TFS*, pp. 513–24; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 94, 224, 231, 235, 334, 343, 369, 371, 377, 391, 393, 418, 439, 443; Siddiqi and Ahmad, *Fourteenth Century Arab Account*, pp. 27, 37–38.

⁶⁸ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 97–98, 120–2, 144, 229, 243–58, 271–83, 311, 322–3, 332–44, 348–9, 357, 394, 397–8, 417, 427; *IM*, pp. 1–11; Siddiqi and Ahmad, *Fourteenth Century Arab Account*, p. 37; *FS*, pp. 463–7; *TF*, p. 133; *TMS*, pp. 37–38.

⁶⁹ *TMS*, pp. 37–38.

⁷⁰ *TFS*, pp. 482, 495; *TF*, p. 137; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 362–9; *FS*, pp. 479 ff.

great numbers,' the new military class would flock to the highest bidder.⁷¹ Widespread insurrection (*fitna bar fitna*) occurred at the instigation (it was generally suspected) of the 'new amīrs,' followed by the defection of major contingents in distant regions of the empire.⁷² Bengal went its own way in 1336 under the Ilyas dynasty.⁷³ An independent Muslim kingdom arose at Madurai, in Ma'bar, in 1333, only to be annexed again by the Hoysalas in 1373.⁷⁴ Late in Muhammad bin Tughluq's reign, in 1348, the Deccan broke away under the Bahmanī dynasty, owing its rise largely to the support of Mongol and Afghan new amirs and their troops.⁷⁵ The truncated empire of Delhi that was left to Fīrūz Shah Tughluq (1351–88), propped up by mamluks, Mongols and Afghans, could restore authority in Sind only.⁷⁶ Further fragmentation occurred under Fīrūz Shah Tughluq's successors.⁷⁷ Then, during Tīmūr's invasion, Delhi lost many of its nobles to the emerging Sharqī or 'Eastern' Sultanate (1394–1479). With its capital at Jaunpur, on the Gumti river to the north of Varanasi, the Sharqī empire became Delhi's greatest rival, establishing control over the area between the Delhi and Bengal Sultanates, from Kol and Rapri to Bihar and Tirhut, and embracing Awadh and the fertile Antardved plain (south of Delhi, between the Yamuna and the Ganges).⁷⁸ Drawing on a similar exodus of people from Delhi during Tīmūr's attack, the dynasty of the Ahmad Shāhīs of Gujarat emerged, from 1391 onwards, out of a governorship of Delhi in a province that was among the most fertile in India and had important commercial and maritime connections.⁷⁹ The Sultanate of Malwa also arose shortly after Tīmūr's invasion, in 1401. The overall result

⁷¹ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 322.

⁷² *TFS*, pp. 504–7, 509, 511–24, 469–70, 478–527; *TF*, pp. 134, 140–3; *FS*, pp. 408–583.

⁷³ *TMS*, pp. 15–16.

⁷⁴ For the Sultanate of Madurai, see esp. H. K. Sherwani and P. M. Joshi (eds), *History of Medieval Deccan (1295–1724)*, 2 Volumes (Hyderabad, 1973–4), I, pp. 57–75.

⁷⁵ *FS*, pp. 525 ff.; *TF*, pp. 138–9.

⁷⁶ *TFS*, pp. 109–21, 144–72, 190–260; *TF*, pp. 145–6, 148, 150, 152; *TMS*, p. 150.

⁷⁷ *TMS*, pp. 132, 138, 145; *TF*, pp. 148–50, 152–3, 155.

⁷⁸ See M. M. Saeed, *The Sharqi Sultanate of Jaunpur: A Political & Cultural History* (Karachi, 1972); *TA*, pp. 446–63; *TF*, II, pp. 304–10; O. Khalidi, 'The African Diaspora in India: the Case of the Habashīs of the Dakan', *Hamdard Islamicus*, XI, 4 (Winter 1988), p. 6 says it was possibly founded by a Habshi eunuch, without giving evidence.

⁷⁹ Misra, *Rise of Muslim Power in Gujarat*; *TA*, pp. 172–414.

was that, by the late fourteenth century, Delhi had two kings residing within its walls, both virtually powerless, but also that there was a substantial Muslim presence almost everywhere in the subcontinent, most of it 'post-nomadic' but with an Indian convert element as well.

After the death of Mahmud Tughluq, the empire of Delhi fell from 'the dynasty of the Turks' (*az silsila' turkān*)⁸⁰ into the hands of the *Sayyids* (1414–1451), a dynasty that, as former governors of Multan and Dipalpur, claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad. About Khizr Khan, the founder of the dynasty, there is the equally fictitious tradition that he received the sovereignty of Delhi directly from Tīmūr.⁸¹ All that can be substantiated is that Khizr Khan, after emerging victoriously from a long power struggle, ruled in Delhi in the name of Tīmūr and, for forty years after the latter's death, the dynasty gave out to derive its authority from Tīmūr's son Shah Rukh, occasionally sending tribute to the Timurid capitals of Samarqand and Herat.⁸² Khizr Khan seems to have held effective authority over Multan, Dipalpur, parts of Sind, and merely a very small territory around Delhi.⁸³ At first he was primarily preoccupied with campaigns against the 'infidels' of Katehr and Mewat, near Delhi.⁸⁴ The governors of virtually every major *iqṭā'* established de facto independence, even though most were reluctant to proclaim their own sovereignty openly.⁸⁵ Khizr Khan, at some point, even lost control of Multan and Dipalpur.

The first half of the fifteenth century, however, also saw the rise to political and military ascendancy of the Afghans in Delhi. Already Khizr Khan recruited numerous Afghan warlords with large followings, and by the 1440s the Afghans had become the real foundation of the Sayyids' power. This appears to have occurred at a time that the Afghans rose to much greater importance in Gujarat, Malwa, Bengal, Jaunpur, Multan, and in various large areas of the Panjab

⁸⁰ *TF*, p. 161.

⁸¹ *TMS*, p. 166; see also Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, p. 318.

⁸² *TMS*, pp. 167–82; *TF*, pp. 161–2; Ahmad, 'Mongol Pressure,' pp. 191–2; M. Zaki (transl.), *Tarikh-i-Muhammadi by Muhammad Bihamad Khani* (Aligarh, 1972), pp. 93, 95; Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, p. 322.

⁸³ *TMS*, pp. 168–9.

⁸⁴ *TMS*, pp. 184–92, 194–227.

⁸⁵ *TMS*, pp. 168–9; *TF*, p. 159.

and Sirhind, and parts of the Doab, as well.⁸⁶ Among Hindus and Muslims alike, the Afghans were still regarded as rustics (*kah mardam roshṭā'nī and*) who 'had never lived at court' and who spoke a barbarous language.⁸⁷ In the Afghan homeland statehood had been aborted by the parochial focus on tribal loyalty and blood feud.⁸⁸ Afghan chiefs were normally no more than first among equals, unwilling to submit to kings, and often too proud to tolerate any authority for long. While in Hind they had been serving in the military since Ghaznavid times and had been rising to official positions by the fourteenth century, by the mid-fifteenth century they appear to have acquired influence in Delhi through their role in the horse trade. The horse trade was one important way for some Afghans to accumulate wealth, and one of the few sources of inequality available to them in their pastoral and semi-pastoral economy, since tolls and booty collected in raids were supposed to be divided in equal shares among tribesmen but not profits made on the trade in horses. The immediate ancestors of Bahlūl Lodī, the founder of the Afghan dynasty that would rule in Delhi in the second half of the fifteenth century, were associated with the horse trade and already made 'frequent excursions to Hind'.⁸⁹ They and other Lodīs began amassing large numbers of troops (up to twelve thousand) from among their own tribe as early as the reign of Khizr Khan (1414–1421).⁹⁰ With his support group of Lodīs and a contingent of twenty thousand Afghan, Mongol and Indian soldiers, Bahlūl Lodī then brought the entire Panjab under his sway and emerged as the most powerful noble in Delhi by 1441.⁹¹ After gathering still more supporters among the Afghans and the Kokhars, he seized the throne in 1451 and proclaimed himself king in 'entire Hind' (*tamām hind*).⁹²

The first Afghan empire (1451–1526), under the dynasty of the Lodīs, restored the authority of Delhi over much of northwestern and northern India.⁹³ After a long conflict, it also overthrew the

⁸⁶ Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, p. 323; Siddiqui, 'Afghans', pp. 257, 259–60; *TF*, pp. 171–2.

⁸⁷ *Al-Hind*, II, p. 193; Roy, *Niamatullah's History of the Afghans*, pp. xii–xiii; Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, IV, p. 437; *TF*, pp. 174–5; *TKJ*, I, p. 140.

⁸⁸ Cf. Siddiqui, 'Afghans', pp. 241–52.

⁸⁹ *TKJ*, I, p. 132; *TF*, p. 173.

⁹⁰ Siddiqui, 'Afghans', pp. 257–9; *TF*, p. 173.

⁹¹ *TKJ*, I, p. 133.

⁹² *TKJ*, I, pp. 133–4, 260; *TS*, pp. 10–11; *TF*, pp. 171–4.

⁹³ *TF*, pp. 175–6.

rulers of Jaunpur in 1478.⁹⁴ The Afghan regime was different from the preceding regimes of Delhi not only in the composition of its ruling class, but more generally in its organisation and ideals, particularly in the way it attempted—unsuccessfully in the end—to transform its informal clannish constituency into a more hierarchically structured monarchy.⁹⁵ Bahlūl Lodī wrote letters to the clans of Roh in which he advertised the great wealth and extent of Hind, recognizing that his kinsmen were hard-pressed for a livelihood in their own country, but that they did have the requisite valour and fighting spirit to come and help him to consolidate the Afghans' conquests, which, he at the same time assured them, would be held on a sharing arrangement, as among brothers, while he himself would be merely a king in name.⁹⁶ With these assurances, we read, for month after month the Afghans of Roh swarmed like ants and locusts to join the Sultan in Hind and they all received an *iqṭāʿ* or a salary or some other form of generous compensation.⁹⁷ The Afghans who came to join Bahlūl Lodī were almost always poverty-stricken individuals rather than chiefs who migrated to Hind with their entire tribes to enter government service.⁹⁸ But in the resulting arrangements of power sharing the loyalty to the clan came first and last, whereas *iqṭāʿ*s and governorships enjoyed almost complete autonomy. And, while the *Saltanat-i-Lodīyān* or 'Lodī Sultanate' was not a confederation of tribes, the Niazi and Sur Afghans were excluded on a tribal basis from all important posts, and the important frontier posts (like Jaunpur and Kalpi) and all the largest *iqṭāʿ*s were given to the numerous princes of the blood.⁹⁹ The chiefs of distinction included the nine sons of Bahlūl and no fewer than thirty-six other bloodrelatives and others intimately connected through family ties with the new king.¹⁰⁰ Bahlūl Lodī divided the public treasury among his supporters, maintained a brotherly intercourse with all his chiefs and soldiers, made no display of royalty, and even during public audiences was seated

⁹⁴ *TF*, pp. 176–8; *TKJ*, I, pp. 34 ff.

⁹⁵ See also A. B. Pandey, *The First Afghan Empire in India (1451–1526)* (Calcutta, 1956).

⁹⁶ S. M. Imam al-Din (ed. and transl.), *The Tārīkh-i-Sher Shāhī of 'Abbas Khan Sarwāmī*, 2 Volumes (Dacca, 1964), I, pp. 2–9 (Persian text) & II, pp. 1–6 (English text).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*; and *TKJ*, I, pp. 139–40.

⁹⁸ Cf. Siddiqui, 'Afghan Nobility', p. 124.

⁹⁹ *TKJ*, I, p. 142; Siddiqui, 'Afghans', pp. 119, 125–6.

¹⁰⁰ *TF*, p. 174.

on a carpet rather than a throne, while he would not allow his nobles to stand.¹⁰¹ In old age he divided his dominions among his sons and relatives, with only Delhi and several districts in the Doab going to his heir and successor Sikandar Lodī.¹⁰²

This Afghan tribal order, however, came under increasingly severe pressure from the non-Afghan elements, both Muslims and non-Muslims, that entered the state on different terms. Already Bahlūl Lodī employed nearly 20,000 Mongols in his service.¹⁰³ And by 1479 the Lodīs had destroyed the Sharqī Sultanate of Jaunpur which had been holding practically the entire Gangetic valley. The Sharqīs had a large army which comprised many Mongols and Tajiks, as well as Afghans, but the backbone of their state were really the Rajputs and 'innumerable zamindars' in such places as Etah, Farrukhabad, Manipuri, Kampil, Bhojpur, and Patiali.¹⁰⁴ Here it was clear by the 1490s that tribal sharing was not going to work. The challenge was to find a new imperial authority structure which could accommodate not only Afghans, but also the Mongols, and Indian Rajputs.

Accordingly, Sikandar Lodī (1489–1517) was the first Afghan king who understood that *Roh* and *Hind* were two quite different countries. Sikandar Lodī still dressed simply, and behaved unostentatiously, but he sat on a couch, and spared no pains educating the uncouth Afghan chiefs and his own clansmen in Indo-Islamic adab.¹⁰⁵ Tribal divisions of Lodīs, Sahukhail, Farmulis, and Lohanis still informed the organization of the army, and *iqṭāʿ*s were apparently assigned in blocks to such dominant divisions.¹⁰⁶ But policies changed. Instead of cozying up with his fellow Afghan tribesmen, Sikandar began to show special regard for 'nobles and shaykhs from Arabia, Persia and various parts of Hind' as well as Rajputs in high places in his own realm, and he also did away with the autonomy of the *iqṭāʿ*s, while instituting auditing and espionage to prevent defalcation to and realize arrears.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ *TF*, p. 179; Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, IV, pp. 436–7.

¹⁰² *TF*, p. 178.

¹⁰³ 'bīst hazār-i-mughal' (*TF*, p. 179).

¹⁰⁴ Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy*, pp. 160–3.

¹⁰⁵ Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, IV, pp. 445–6; Roy, *Niamatullah's History of the Afghans*, p. 111; Siddiqui, 'Afghans', p. 129.

¹⁰⁶ Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, IV, pp. 459, 547.

¹⁰⁷ *TF*, pp. 179–82; Siddiqui, 'Afghans', pp. 127–31; Roy, *Niamatullah's History of the Afghans*, p. 111.

Sikandar's son Ibrahim Lodī (1517–1526) officially abandoned clan politics altogether and made it known that he had every intention to treat all Afghans as subjects and servants of his state.¹⁰⁸ After a splendid coronation, he forced the Afghan chiefs to stand in front of the throne with their hands crossed before them.¹⁰⁹ Ibrahim Lodī introduced an early form of a *mansab* or 'ranking' system among the nobility, and went against the system of patrimonial sharing among his own brothers, keeping a tight rein on the old nobility of his predecessors, then began to rule 'without fear' and 'without admitting a partner to share his empire.'¹¹⁰ Jealous of the claims to royal privilege of the Sahukhail clan to which the Lodīs belonged, the other Afghans then solicited Babur to help them regain their power. But Babur, the descendant of Tīmūr and Chingiz Khan, made a clean sweep of the Afghan presence in Delhi: 'The Afghans, after being absolute rulers for seventy years, left their habitations, their goods and their wealth, and dispersed to Bengal.'¹¹¹

b) *The regional Indo-Islamic empires*

Among the regional Indo-Islamic empires and states of the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the composition of the ruling elites was generally more determined by Indian converts and/or non-converted Indians than had been the case in the empire of Delhi itself. But, almost always, specifically post-nomadic groups continued to dominate the top levels even here. We see this in Bengal, Kashmir, Sind and Thatta, Gujarat, Malwa and Khandesh, and in the Deccan. Moreover, in those provincial Indo-Islamic states that had important maritime connections we find that significant numbers of Habshis or 'Abyssinians' were imported from overseas. The latter were often sharply distinguished from the elite 'Khurasanians' even though they were Muslims. But they too can be loosely designated a post-nomadic group, with origins in the arid zone of East Africa.

¹⁰⁸ *TF*, pp. 188–9.

¹⁰⁹ *TF*, pp. 188–9; *TS*, pp. 66–88.

¹¹⁰ *TS*, pp. 69–76, 83; *TF*, p. 190.

¹¹¹ *TS*, pp. 91–99.

Bengal

The relationship of the Islamic dynasties of Bengal with Delhi is often extremely obscure.¹¹² A rich province, it proved difficult to control from Delhi from the beginning, and appears to have been virtually independent already in 1287, after the death of Balban. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, eastern Bengal was conquered, and the Brahmaputra was crossed into Assam. Ghiyath ad-Din Tughluq briefly restored control, establishing governorships in Lakhnauti and Sonargaon, in the west and east of Bengal. From 1338 to 1414, Bengal was, to all appearances, still in the hands of Turks and perhaps Khalajis and other Muslim immigrants, under the independent Ilyas Shahi dynasty. But, throughout much of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, Bengali Muslim society expanded through conversion among a newly emerging peasantry when the active part of the Bengal delta shifted eastwards, and political control passed into the hands of the Hindu convert dynasty of Raja Ganesh from 1414 to 1436, and back to the restored Ilyas Shahi dynasty between 1437 and 1487.¹¹³ Sultan Rukun ad-Din Barbak Shah, the Ilyas Shahi ruler who ascended the throne in 1459, appears to have started the importation, directly by sea, of Habshi slaves for his military. He is on record to have had eight thousand of them, many of which rose to high rank.¹¹⁴ His successor Yusuf Shah (1474–1481) continued to use Habshis but, in an attempt to check their overweening influence, created a palace guard of five thousand Bengali pāik footmen as well. Eunuchs of local origin also played a major role in Bengal, seizing power in 1486 after murdering the last Ilyas ruler.¹¹⁵ Two months later the Habshis under Malik Andil, in their turn, were able to topple the Bengali eunuchs and paiks as well as the remnants of the old Turkish ruling elite.¹¹⁶ Malik Andil was the first ruler of the Puriya dynasty of Habshis which ruled at Gaur for seven years,

¹¹² For Bengal, see *TA*, pp. 414–46; *TF*, II, pp. 292–304; R. M. Eaton, 'Islam in Bengal', in: G. Michell (ed.), *The Islamic Heritage of Bengal* (Paris, 1984), pp. 23–36; idem, *Bengal Frontier*, esp. pp. 40–70.

¹¹³ The exact chronology is confused: cf. *TA*, pp. 430–1; *TF*, II, p. 297.

¹¹⁴ *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden, 1971), s.v. Habshis, p. 14; R. M. Eaton, 'The rise and collapse of state slavery in the Bengal Sultanate' (Unpublished paper presented at the Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, 6–8 November, 1992), p. 5.

¹¹⁵ *TF*, pp. 299–300; G. Hambly, 'A note on the trade in eunuchs in Mughal Bengal', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 94.1 (1974), pp. 127–9.

¹¹⁶ *TF*, pp. 299–300.

from 1487 to 1495. This stint of Habshi rule dragged Bengal into an orgy of violence.¹¹⁷ When a new dynasty was founded in 1494 by 'Alā ad-Dīn Husayn Shah, there still were in the royal guards five thousand Habshis and just three thousand Bengalis and Afghans.¹¹⁸ Husayn Shah, in his twenty-seven year reign, again favoured 'Muslim amirs of old lineage,' the descendants of Turkish, Khalajī, and other 'Khurasanian' immigrants of an earlier age, many of whom were now invited back to the capital.¹¹⁹ The Bengali paiks were disbanded, and many Habshis were expelled.¹²⁰ According to Ferishta, no town in Bengal, after their expulsion, would allow them in again, so that they were forced to retire to Gujarat and the Deccan.¹²¹ There is however other evidence that the Habshis did not disappear from Bengal for very long. Pires still wrote in the early sixteenth century:

'The people who govern the kingdom are Abyssinians. These are looked upon as knights; they are greatly esteemed; they wait on the kings and great lords in the kingdom. Those who are not eunuchs are fighting men. After the king it is to these people that the kingdom is obedient from fear.'¹²²

Under the new dynasty there was a dramatic increase of Hindu participation in Bengal. The annexation of large parts of Bihar and the influx of disbanded Jaunpur troops that followed the collapse of the Sharqi Sultanate also strengthened Bengal prior to its becoming an Afghan dominion.¹²³

Kashmir

The first Muslim dynasty of Kashmir was founded in 1324 by Shah Mīrzā, who was probably an Afghan warrior from Swat or a Qarauna Turk, possibly even a Tibetan, who rebuilt the kingdom which had been devastated by recent Mongol invasions, overtaxation, and the predation of neighbouring chiefs.¹²⁴ The dynasty pursued an expan-

¹¹⁷ *TF*, II, p. 301.

¹¹⁸ *TF*, II, pp. 301–2.

¹¹⁹ *TA*, pp. 442–3.

¹²⁰ *TF*, II, pp. 301–2.

¹²¹ *TF*, II, p. 302.

¹²² Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 88.

¹²³ *TA*, p. 444.

¹²⁴ Cf. Ahmad, 'Conversions to Islam', pp. 9–10; Sufi, *Islamic Culture in Kashmir*, pp. 50, 52. For Kashmir generally, see: R. K. Parmu, *A History of Muslim Rule in Kashmir, 1320–1819* (Delhi, 1969); S. C. Ray, *Early History of Kashmir* (New Delhi,

sionist policy beyond Kashmir's mountainous borders from 1359 onwards, in Tibet, the Panjab, Sind, Peshawar, and in Jammu (with which it developed close matrimonial ties as well), and in 1398 was ready to support Tīmūr.¹²⁵ While absorbing an immigrant Muslim elite, the local Hindu-Buddhist population appears to have begun converting to Islam in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries on a wide scale. Evidently, unconverted brahmins still held high administrative offices under Shah Mirzā and the early Sultans.¹²⁶ But under Sikandar Butshikan (1394–1416) a brahman was appointed prime minister who became notorious for persecuting Hindus with a convert's zeal.¹²⁷ This happened at a time when the challenge to brahman influence was severe and Kashmir was rapidly Islamizing due to the influx of Muslims from Iraq, Khurasan and Mā warā' annahr—collectively referred to as *Sayyids* or *Saidas*—who were either responding to Sultan Butshikan's liberality or were trying to evade Tīmūr's onslaught. The Sayyids quickly took over the key administrative posts and even succeeded in establishing matrimonial ties with the ruling house.¹²⁸ 'Shekandhara [Sikandar],' writes the Kashmir chronicler Jonaraja,

'had a fondness for the yavanas [foreigners], even as a boy had a fondness for flies. Many yavanas left other sovereigns and took shelter under this king who was renowned for charity, even as bees leave the flowers and settle on elephants.'¹²⁹

The survival of the culture of Kashmir was at stake: 'As the wind destroys the trees and the locusts the shali crop, so did the yavanas destroy the usages of Kashmira.'¹³⁰ In the persecution of brahmins Sikandar was outdone only by his brahman minister Suha, who, in his excessive devotion to 'the religion of the Turushkas,' induced many brahmins to commit suicide or attempt to flee the country.¹³¹ These tendencies were however radically reversed under Sultan Zayn

1970); N. K. Zutshi, *Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin of Kashmir: An Age of Enlightenment* (Jammu, 1976); *TF*, II, pp. 333–67; *TA*, pp. 632–761.

¹²⁵ *TF*, II, pp. 339, 342–3; *TA*, pp. 640–5, 652; Sadhu, *Medieval Kashmir*, Introduction, p. 12.

¹²⁶ Sufi, *Islamic Culture in Kashmir*, p. 32.

¹²⁷ *TF*, II, p. 341.

¹²⁸ *TA*, p. 647; Sadhu, *Medieval Kashmir*, Introduction, pp. 6–8.

¹²⁹ Sadhu, *Medieval Kashmir*, p. 52.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 57–59, 62.

al-‘Ābidīn, whose career was devoted to reviving ‘the country ruined by the mlecchas’ and to put an end to ‘Turushka’ oppression of brahmans, bring back the disregarded laws of previous ages ‘as the king revives the plants destroyed by the winter.’¹³² Brahmans again rose to high positions, and Buddhists too. The golden image of the Buddha was saved from the yavanas.¹³³ Later again, under Sultan Hasan (1472–1484) and Muhammad Shah (1489–1499) the Sayyids came back to power, ‘eager for the kingdom as vultures are for meat,’ and they ‘regarded the people of Kashmira scarcely even as grass.’¹³⁴ There thus appears to have been a constant struggle between Sayyids and Kashmiris, wherein the former, however, were mainly concentrated in the capital. Beyond the capital, local politics continued to be dominated by numerous clans such as the Chaks, Lavanyas, Dars, and Padars, and hilltribes such as the Zulachas, Renchens, Gakkhars, Kashgaris, and others.¹³⁵ Conversion to Islam proceeded slowly here, if at all.

Sind and Thatta

We are considerably less well informed about the composition of the ruling elites of Sind and Thatta, Gujarat, Malwa, and Khandesh. The dynasties of Sind and Thatta emerged from converted local chiefs or zamindars which consisted essentially of two groups, the Sūmrās and the Sammas.¹³⁶ The first to rise to power were the Sūmrās (Sāmira), who traced themselves to the conquest of Al-Hajjāj.¹³⁷ They are said to have held the government for 500 or 550 years according to some sources, and from 1300 AD to 1439 AD according to others. Most likely, Sind and Thatta, with their mud-forts on both sides of the Indus river, were transferred to the Sammas and their *ġām* kings (fictitious descendants of Jamshīd, most probably with a pastoral-nomadic origin in Cutch) around the middle of the fourteenth century, and the latter declared their independence from Delhi after the death of Firuz Shah Tughluq (who tried to take

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 63–68.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 199–200, 215, 222, 231.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. 12.

¹³⁶ *TF*, II, pp. 311–23; *TA*, pp. 761–87; U. M. Daudpota (ed.), *Ta’rīkh-i-Sind* (Poona, 1938), pp. 61–79.

¹³⁷ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 101.

it in 1388), and Sind remained under its own Sultans, as far as can be made out, throughout the fifteenth century.¹³⁸ The Rajas of both the Little and the Great Rann of Cutch are said to have descended from the Samma kings.

Gujarat

Similarly, Zafar Khan Muzaffar, the first independent ruler of Gujarat, was not a foreign Muslim but a Khatri convert, of a low subdivision called Tank, originally from the southern Panjab, but born in Delhi, where he rose from menial to noble status in the Delhi Sultan's household.¹³⁹ As the governor of Gujarat he became independent from Delhi after Tīmūr devastated the city and immense numbers of people fled to Gujarat, to end up in the new capitals of Ahmadabad and Champaner-Muhammadabad. Mamluk slaves of various origins played a significant role in Gujarat too, including Habshis, who arrived through Gujarat's seaports.¹⁴⁰

Malwa

In Malwa, the founder of the dynasty of Ghūrīs (1401–1436) was descended from Sultan Shahab ad-Dīn Ghūrī of Damascus on his mother's side, while his grandfather came from Ghūr and held a high position among the nobility of Delhi.¹⁴¹ The subsequent Khalajī dynasty (1436–1531) had the same origin as the Khalajī dynasty of Delhi, and apparently relied on a Khalajī following (the size of which is unknown), but here there were Habshis too, and around 1467 we read about 'twelve thousand Afghans and Rajputs' fighting in the Malwa army.¹⁴² Clearly, in their contests with the Sharqīs, the Sayyids of Delhi, the Gujarati dynasty, and the Bahmanīs, the Sultans of Malwa were compelled to come to terms with and ally themselves with local Hindu princes and zamindars, both in their own and their rivals' realms.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ *TF*, II, p. 317; Daudpota, *Ta'rikh-i-Sind*, p. 70; *IM*, pp. 19–21; *TFSa*, pp. 191, 199–200.

¹³⁹ *TA*, pp. 180–1; *TF*, II, p. 179; Misra, *Rise of Muslim Power in Gujarat*, pp. 137–8.

¹⁴⁰ Khalidi, 'African Diaspora', p. 7; *TA*, p. 242.

¹⁴¹ *TA*, pp. 465–97; *TF*, II, p. 234.

¹⁴² *TA*, pp. 497 ff., 564; *TF*, II, pp. 251, 348.

¹⁴³ F. Simin, 'Role of Zamindars in Malwa-Gujarat Relations, 15th Century', *Indian History Congress, 43d Session* (Kurukshetra, 1982).

Khandesh

The name of this state refers to the 'Land of the Khans,' in the Tapti valley, south of Malwa, of which we know practically nothing since no special chronicle of the Fārūqī dynasty of Khandesh exists.¹⁴⁴ It can perhaps be speculated that it conformed to some extent to patterns that were established in the adjacent Deccan, and which are relatively well-documented, or in Gujarat, its more powerful neighbour from which its kings received the title of 'Khān' and to which it continued to pay tribute until 1497.¹⁴⁵ Habshis were prominent in Khandesh too.

Deccan

The Bahmanī dynasty of the Deccan (1348–1527) was founded by Zafar Khan, who, according to Ferishta, was an Afghan by birth, but the name of the dynasty derives from the various claims that were made on his behalf that he was a descendant of the ancient Persian king Bahman or, alternatively, that he had been a servant to a brahman astrologer.¹⁴⁶ The dynasty broke away from Delhi with the aid of Afghan and Mongol 'New Muslims' and first ruled from Gulbarga-Ahsanabad, and from Bīdar-Muhammadabad after 1425, when the Hindu state of Warangal was overthrown and the Bahmanī Deccan came to follow almost exactly the geographical contours of the central peninsula. To the north it was bounded by the Vindhya mountain range and included all of Berār and Maharashtra (the *wilāyat-i-marhat*),¹⁴⁷ while the tribal belt of Gondwāna, to the north-east, served as a hunting ground, particularly for elephants.¹⁴⁸ To the south it contested the Raichur Doab—the rich agricultural area which also had mineral wealth, between the Tungabhadra and the Krishna rivers (running from Mudgal to the confluence of the two rivers)—with the Hindu kings of Vijayanagara residing at Hampi, on the south bank of the Tungabhadra.¹⁴⁹ The eastern frontier of

¹⁴⁴ *TF*, II, pp. 276–291; C. F. Beckingham, 'Amba Geshen and Asīrgarh', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, II (1957), pp. 182–8.

¹⁴⁵ *TF*, II, p. 281.

¹⁴⁶ *TF*, pp. 273–4, 281; *TA*, p. 4. For the Bahmanis generally, see: Sherwani and Joshi, *History of Medieval Deccan*, I, pp. 142–206; H. K. Sherwani, *The Bahmanis of the Deccan* (Hyderabad, 1953); *TF*, pp. 277–376.

¹⁴⁷ *TF*, p. 280.

¹⁴⁸ *TF*, p. 316; *TA*, pp. 500, 540.

¹⁴⁹ P. M. Joshi, 'The Raichur Doab in Deccan History—Reinterpretation of a Struggle', *Journal of Indian History*, 36, 3 (1958), pp. 379–96.

the Bahmanī empire was first at Golkonda, where the eastern Ghats and Telangana come together, but after this limit was reached, the plains and the coast up to Rājamahendri were conquered as well; effective control on the eastcoast did not extend beyond the mouth of the Krishna.¹⁵⁰ The western frontier was the western Ghats, but from there the Konkan was occupied, with its maritime outlets of Chaul, Dābhol and Goa. Even then, having reached this maximum extent, the Bahmanīs were inferior to Vijayanagara in wealth, territory, population, and revenue.¹⁵¹ However, the Bahmanīs' continued ability to recruit an army of Muslim mounted archers, with superior horses, from abroad made them militarily superior to Vijayanagara.¹⁵² It was the Hindu dynasty that had to pay tribute, and cede daughters, to the Bahmanīs, not the other way around.¹⁵³ And in the fourteenth century both Warangal and Vijayanagara had subordinated themselves to the King of Delhi, while the Bahmanīs, in 1398, pledged allegiance to Tīmūr.¹⁵⁴ Tīmūr then nominally granted the Bahmanīs the sovereignty of the as yet weakly developed Muslim states of Malwa and Gujarat, with the ensigns of royalty, prompting the latter in their turn to pledge their support to Vijayanagara (for which this provided an occasion to interrupt their tribute payments to the Bahmanīs for four years).¹⁵⁵ The Bahmanīs, after the fall of Warangal, carried their wars to Malwa and Gujarat, but did not formally assume sovereignty in these areas. Even the Deccan by itself soon proved to be too large to be controlled by one empire and was divided up among the 'Imād-Shāhīs of Berār (1485–1572), the 'Adil-Shāhīs of Bijapur (1490–1686), the Nizām-Shāhīs of Ahmadnagar (1491–1633), and the Qutb-Shāhīs of Golkonda (1512–1687).¹⁵⁶ Significantly, from a geographic point of view, the first of these, taking over the former Bahmanī capital of Bidar, quickly vanished, as the city was not sustained by any productive part of the Deccan. Bijapur, by contrast, controlled the Krishna-Tungabhadra Doab, while Ahmadnagar commanded the waterparting of the Godavari and

¹⁵⁰ Sherwani, *Bahmanis*, p. 10.

¹⁵¹ *TF*, pp. 299, 301, 306–7, 331, 349, 355.

¹⁵² *TF*, p. 332.

¹⁵³ *TF*, pp. 301, 306–7.

¹⁵⁴ *TF*, p. 312.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *TF*, p. 376.

the Bhima, and Golkonda had the alluvial soil on its coast in the southeast.¹⁵⁷

Among the politico-military elites of the Deccan two groups came to be distinguished: the *Dakkanīs*, and the *Āfāqīs* or 'Foreigners.' The first included: northern immigrants from the Tughluq realm who participated in the foundation of the Bahmanī state, such as the Afghan and Mongol 'New Muslims'; other Muslims, above all Arabs, whose ancestors had come to the Deccan since about the tenth century; Hindu converts to Islam; unconverted Hindus, such as the Marathas; and Habshis.¹⁵⁸ The Habshis, of course, were not native to the Deccan, but it was here that they were the most active, from the beginnings of Bahmanī rule, and that they remained the most powerful, well into the seventeenth century, much longer than in Delhi, Gujarat or Bengal.¹⁵⁹ They were usually of slave origin but there were also free Habshis who fought as mercenaries and who had never been slaves, especially in the Konkan, and as such they became important in Janjira as a naval force, perhaps as early as 1489.¹⁶⁰ The traffic in Habshi slaves has always been mostly a maritime enterprise, and Habshis were well-known throughout the western Indian Ocean as men-at-sea.¹⁶¹ It was not uncommon for Habshis to rise into the nobility. Most of them, however, were just military men, while Habshi women were common in the Indo-Islamic harems. To identify Habshis as 'Abyssinians' or 'Ethiopians' is, in fact, simplistic. If they came from Ethiopia at all, they often came from tribute-paying subject peoples in the frontier areas of the Ethiopian empire, and they could come from as far north as the Nubian desert, or from Somalia, or from yet other regions of Africa further to the south, such as Zanzibar.¹⁶² It has been suggested that most of the Habshis of the Deccan and Gujarat actually came from the arid region of present-day Tanzania.¹⁶³ In the Deccan, the Habshis, in

¹⁵⁷ Sherwani, *Bahmanis*, pp. 10–11.

¹⁵⁸ R. M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300–1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 40–41; A. Wink, 'Islamic Society and Culture in the Deccan', in: A. L. Dallapiccola and S. Zingel-Avé Lallemand (eds), *Islam in Indian Regions, 2 Volumes* (Stuttgart, 1993), I, p. 224.

¹⁵⁹ S. Sadiq Ali, *The African Dispersal in the Deccan* (New Delhi, 1996), pp. 1–2; *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1971), s.v. Habshī, p. 15; Wink, 'Islamic Society', pp. 224–5.

¹⁶⁰ Wink, 'Islamic Society', pp. 224–5; Sadiq Ali, *African Dispersal*, p. 28.

¹⁶¹ *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 29–33.

¹⁶² Sadiq Ali, *African Dispersal*, p. 3; Khalidi, 'African Diaspora', p. 6.

¹⁶³ Sadiq Ali, *African Dispersal*, p. 3.

any case, were no longer distinguished from the Zanjīs (which formerly denoted the people of the eastcoast of Africa and Zanzibar proper). They were all Sunni Muslims, as was the mixed offspring of Habshis and Indian women who were referred to as Muwallads.¹⁶⁴ Much remains unknown about them. There are only a few Habshi architectural remains. Outside the town of Bidar, Habshis had their own stronghold, Habshi Kot, where Habshi tombs are found.¹⁶⁵ The Habshis are however mentioned innumerable times in the Indo-Persian chronicles, and what we know about their activities as individuals and as a group derives almost entirely from these sources.

The more elitist *Āfāqīs* or *Gharībān*, i.e. Foreigners, often originated from or came via the coasts of the Persian Gulf, and from further north around the Caspian Sea.¹⁶⁶ These were the same class of people that Nikitin referred to as 'Khurasanians,' as when he observed that the Khan of Junnar had many 'Khurasanians' among his attendants at court, who came from Khurasan, Oroban, Sirkmesk and Chetogan, and who, he says, 'are all brought over by sea in tavas or Indian ships.'¹⁶⁷ They were nobles, soldiers, merchants, scholars, literati, as well as religious figures, and started to travel to the Deccan directly, via de searoutes, as early as the final decades of the fourteenth century.¹⁶⁸ As a group they had a clear sense of superiority over the Dakkanis from the beginning, including those who represented the northern Tughluq tradition, over whom they increasingly prevailed. Sultan 'Alā' ad-Dīn Mujāhid Bahmanī (1375–1378) made 'Turks and Persians' his favourite companions, while he himself spoke the Turki language.¹⁶⁹ A second major drive to recruit such foreign Muslims occurred under Sultan Fīrūz Shāh Bahmanī (1397–1422), who sent ships from Goa and Chaul to fetch the most meritorious individuals of all nations, and who also 'spoke many languages with the foreigners.'¹⁷⁰ The break with the Tughluqid aristocratic heritage was completed under Sultan Ahmad Shāh Bahmanī (1422–36). The latter, moving his capital to Bidar, presided over a virtual colonization

¹⁶⁴ Digby, 'Maritime Trade of India', p. 149; Sadiq Ali, *African Dispersal*, p. 41.

¹⁶⁵ Khalidi, 'African Diaspora', p. 14.

¹⁶⁶ Sherwani, *Bahmanis*, p. 77.

¹⁶⁷ Major, *India*, III, pp. 9–10.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*; Wink, 'Islamic Society', p. 220.

¹⁶⁹ *TF*, p. 296.

¹⁷⁰ *TF*, p. 308.

of the Deccan by Foreigners, and a transition to Foreign, particularly Persian, ascendancy at the highest levels of the government.¹⁷¹ Large military units of mounted archers were put together of the natives of Iraq, Mā warā' an-nahr, Turkistān, and Arabia.¹⁷² Many Mongol officers and three thousand Mongol bowmen (*mughal-i-tirāndāz*) were inducted into the service of Firuz Shah and Ahmad Shah Bahmani—among which two lineal descendants of Chingiz Khan—and Ahmad Shah Bahmani is alleged to have ordered that the Mongols should from then on take precedence over the Dakkanis.¹⁷³ It was from this time in particular that resentment between the Dakkanis and the Foreigners increased, and often became sectarian (with the Persians turning to Shī'ism), while more and more emphasis was given to the recruitment of Mongol archers.¹⁷⁴ More than seven thousand Mongol archers were sent to Berar in 1437.¹⁷⁵ But in the Deccan, the role of the New Muslim Mongols had been crucial from the very beginning, and it remained so prominent that the name 'Mughal' was sometimes used for all foreign Muslims, including Turkish, Georgian, Circassian, and Qalmuq mamluks and other 'Tartars' (who had a very substantial presence in the Deccan), the thousands of Arabian cavalry, as well as Afghans and Rajputs, and others.¹⁷⁶ These patterns of elite recruitment persisted in largely unmodified form into the early decades of the five Deccan Sultanates that replaced the Bahmanī empire and which themselves emerged from among both the Foreigners and the Dakkanis, including Indian converts.¹⁷⁷

THE PENINSULAR HINDU EMPIRES OF WARANGAL AND VIJAYANAGARA

During the first successful, and quite lucrative, raids into the peninsula, 'Alā' ad-Dīn Khalajī and his commanders came up against four

¹⁷¹ Wink, 'Islamic Society', p. 220.

¹⁷² *TF*, p. 322.

¹⁷³ *TF*, pp. 331–2.

¹⁷⁴ *TF*, pp. 321, 331, 335–8, 345, 362–74; Sadiq Ali, *African Dispersal*, pp. 43–55; O. Khalidi, 'The Shī'ahs of the Deccan: an Introduction', *Hamdard Islamicus*, XV, 4 (Winter, 1992), pp. 35–36.

¹⁷⁵ *TF*, p. 331.

¹⁷⁶ *TF*, pp. 303–4, 334–8, 359, 361; *TA*, pp. 40, 93, 107, 111–2, 114, 116.

¹⁷⁷ *TF*, II, pp. 2–126, 167–8, 174, 176; *TA*, pp. 159, 161, 136, 154, 167–8.

major Hindu dynasties.¹⁷⁸ These were the Yadavas of Deogīr, ruling the western Deccan and the Maratha country (*mulk-i-marhaṭa*) as far south as the Krishna river;¹⁷⁹ the Hoysalas of Dvārasamudram, in Karnataka, the densely forested country running from the Krishna river to the deep south, between the Canara coast and Telangānā,¹⁸⁰ the Kakatiyas of Warangal, in Telangānā ('Tilang'),¹⁸¹ and the Pandyas of Ma'bar, in the Tamil country, including the Coromandel coast.¹⁸² Inscriptional evidence shows that these new dynasties represented highly militarized post-nomadic political formations with indigenous roots in the ecologically less-favoured interior regions which hosted pastoral lifestyles since prehistoric times and which had levels of physical and social mobility not found elsewhere in the peninsula.¹⁸³ Across the Indian peninsula, from the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries onwards, polities based in the large, formerly marginal, zone of upland, arid territory were able to establish increased control over the more fertile and densely populated old riverine core kingdoms.¹⁸⁴ These shifting patterns of dominance strikingly resembled those of the Indo-Islamic empires of the same centuries.

The Kakatiya empire (1175–1325) was created by Telugu warriors of upland Andhra (Telangana in the North and Rayalsima in the south) who conquered the lowland subregions, including coastal Andhra with the Krishna and Godavari deltas. Thanks to its more detailed inscriptional record, the Kakatiya polity is better known than the other polities of the semi-arid zone of the subcontinent, those of the Yadavas, Hoysalas, and Pandyas. The paradigm of these polities, however, was the same in each case: a mixed economy of pastoralism, shifting cultivation, and settled agriculture; prevalence of armed conflict and widespread militarism, with the role of horses becoming increasingly important; great dynamism and high risk-tolerance

¹⁷⁸ *KF*, pp. 55–59, 65–68, 73–172; *TF*, pp. 25, 299; *TF*, II, pp. 233–4; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 182, 191, 196, 208; *TFS*, pp. 222, 326, 300, 327–8, 330, 333–4, 390, 447–8; *FS*, pp. 224, 226, 230, 289–90, 312–3, 327–8.

¹⁷⁹ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 182; *TFS*, pp. 222, 326; *FS*, pp. 224, 226, 230, 327–8; *KF*, pp. 65–68.

¹⁸⁰ *TFS*, pp. 333–4; *KF*, pp. 113–72; *TF*, p. 299.

¹⁸¹ *TFS*, pp. 300, 327–8, 330; *KF*, pp. 73–113.

¹⁸² Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 196; *FS*, pp. 289–90; *KF*, pp. 113–72; *TFS*, pp. 333–4.

¹⁸³ C. Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra* (New Delhi, 2001), pp. 11, 23, 26, 43.

¹⁸⁴ B. Stein, *Vijayanagara* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 21.

in a relatively non-hierarchical and individualistic society, for which the militant devotionism of Virashaivism provided a potent justification, and a fluidity of social identities that can be explained only in the context of abundant physical movement and change.¹⁸⁵ These features contrasted sharply with those of the conservative social order, with the hierarchical rules and regulations of caste society which were fully elaborated in the agricultural context of the settled plains. Carrying along their martial tradition, in the late fourteenth and fifteenth to mid-sixteenth centuries, Telugu warriors of upland Andhra migrated to other regions in the peninsula—Karnataka, Tamil Nadu—where they displaced or partly incorporated forest peoples from above the ghats, often independently of larger military movements.¹⁸⁶ The Kakatiya capital of Warangal itself was captured in 1325 by the Muslim invaders, its former territories, after a period of turmoil, divided up among the Bahmanī Sultanate, which dominated large portions of western interior Andhra from the second half of the fourteenth century onwards, and the Vijayanagara kingdom of southern Karnataka which, established in 1336 on the ruins of the Kampili successors of the Hoysalas in the Karnataka, controlled much of southern interior Andhra.

While the origin of its founders remains uncertain, the rise of the Vijayanagara empire clearly epitomizes the new importance of the arid upland.¹⁸⁷ The deities that were advanced during the Vijayanagara period all had the attributes of fierce warriors, indicating the important role which the marginal populations from which these deities were drawn—especially the pastoralist communities of the inland southern Deccan—had come to play in the military and political structure.¹⁸⁸ As under the Hoysalas and Kakatiyas, tank irrigation under the Vijayanagara kings was the critical instrument for extending the resource base of the arid zone of the central peninsula itself. This combined with far-reaching military reform along the lines of contemporary Indo-Islamic states. As early as the 1140s there are references to Muslim warriors employed by kings of the Hoysala

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Talbot, *Precolonial India*, pp. 45–47, 65–85.

¹⁸⁶ Talbot, *Precolonial India*, pp. 47, 197; Stein, *Vijayanagara*, pp. 45–46.

¹⁸⁷ Stein, *Vijayanagara*, p. 21.

¹⁸⁸ C. M. Sinopoli, 'From the Lion Throne: Political and Social Dynamics of the Vijayanagara Empire', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 43, 3 (August, 2000), p. 376.

dynasty. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the employment of large contingents of Muslim mounted archers, made possible by vastly expanded imports of superior horses, condemned the older areas of river valley settlement to complete subordination.¹⁸⁹ While there was constant conflict and warfare with the Bahmanīs, the impact of Muslims on Peninsular India raised not only the military but also the commercial stakes, leading to extensive monetization and fiscal reform. By the middle of the fifteenth century, Muslim mercenaries were being supplemented by indigenous contingents of locally trained mounted archers, while deepening political control over west-coast emporia further improved the reliability and quality of the overseas horse imports.¹⁹⁰ An entirely new peninsular imperial order thus arose, which placed considerable reliance on great military commanders, and which, in its court-life, political language, elite dress-code, and innovative pan-regional architectural style, substantially adjusted to Indo-Islamic styles as well.¹⁹¹ There are the remains of mosque and tomb architecture in an Islamic quarter of Hampi, dating from the early fifteenth century and afterwards. The Vijayanagara king's title, first found in an inscription of 1352, of 'Sultan among Hindu Kings' (*Hindu-rāya-suratrāna*) unambiguously situated him in the world of Indo-Islamic political discourse.¹⁹²

THE CONDITION OF POST-NOMADISM

The post-nomadic empires discussed in this chapter were the product of the fusion of frontier and settled society. They are specifically associated with the ecological condition of the Indian subcontinent. As has been shown, due to its position at the southeastern extreme of the arid zone, the Indian subcontinent was a zone of transition between the nomadic world of deserts and steppes (extending from North Africa to Central and Inner Asia) on the one hand and the

¹⁸⁹ Stein, *Vijayanagara*, pp. 18, 20–21; Sinopoli, 'From the Lion Throne', pp. 370, 377.

¹⁹⁰ Stein, *Vijayanagara*, pp. 29, 41, 70.

¹⁹¹ Ph. B. Wagoner, '“Sultan among Hindu Kings”: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 55, 4 (November, 1996), p. 852.

¹⁹² Wagoner, 'Sultan among Hindu Kings', pp. 852, 863–4; Sinopoli, 'From the Lion Throne', p. 381.

humid, equatorial parts of the Indian Ocean where intensive agriculture was practiced in river plains enclosed by rainforests on the other. Unable to sustain long-range nomadism of the type encountered in large parts of the arid zone outside India, the extensions of the arid zone within the subcontinent were nonetheless important. They ensured that the subcontinent was closely linked to the nomadic world of the arid zone, and shared some of its features, but yet remained at one remove of it. Historically, the result was conquest and colonization by people with a nomadic origin but not nomadization.

The absence of important arid or semi-arid zone territories in the mainland of Southeast Asia and the Malay-Indonesian archipelago made it impossible for post-nomadic empires to develop there. Population movements that occurred in medieval Burma and Thailand originated in the north, but not in areas of the arid zone where pastoral nomadism prevailed. The Burmans who, in the ninth century AD, entered the central Irrawaddy plain—an area between 19 and 23 degrees north latitude, where much of the force of the monsoon is spent—were practitioners of dry agriculture, sometimes perhaps slash-and-burn agriculturists, and they were no doubt familiar with animal husbandry, but they were not pastoral nomads. Their main contribution was the development of river-based irrigation systems. Similarly, the Tai who dispersed across large areas of the mainland after 1000 AD came from the relatively barren lands in the north (southern China or the area north of Chiangmai), but there is no evidence that they were pastoral nomads at any time in their history.¹⁹³ Tai colonization appears to have been a slow process of many centuries, even though in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries it included some well-planned and carefully executed military exploits.¹⁹⁴ Significantly, again, the Mongol incursions in these regions were mere incidents, with no lasting results, and the spread of Tai/Shan power did not depend on alliances with the Mongols.¹⁹⁵ What happened in the mainland states was associated with territorial consol-

¹⁹³ Ch. Kasetsiri, *The Rise of Ayudhya: A History of Siam in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Kuala Lumpur, 1976), p. 31.

¹⁹⁴ B. J. Terwiel, 'Burma in Early Thai Sources: An Essay on Modes of Perception', in: J. J. L. Gommans and J. Leider (eds), *The maritime frontier of Burma: exploring political, cultural and commercial interaction in the Indian Ocean world* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 18–19, 21–22.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

idation, administratively and culturally, of empires that were shaped by the region's north-south segmentation, with no sustained influx of post-nomadic people.¹⁹⁶ And in Java too we encounter a closed, hierarchical society that was increasingly compromised by maritime developments but not by post-nomadism. In the agrarian interior of Java, all displacement was and continued to be seen as subversive. There were in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in the periphery of Java's sedentary agriculture, some semi-nomadic groups, such as the Kalang. These were mostly outside the control of the state and were regarded as savage woodsmen by the sedentaries.¹⁹⁷ But they were small in size and hardly instrumental in empire building. Cattle-breeding was in any case limited, since cattle was used mainly in agriculture and for transport, while only in a few places buffaloes were bred in a halfwild state for meat, their flesh being cured rather like pemmican (dendeng).¹⁹⁸ In Java, too, the Mongol expeditions were incidental seaborne military endeavours, with no nomads involved.

In the post-nomadic empires of the medieval Indian subcontinent, by contrast, there were a number of characteristics shared by all. The first and perhaps most striking characteristic is the very high degree of military mobilization of these empires. The post-nomadic empires of Hind of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were in an almost permanent state of military mobilization, even after the Mongol threat had subsided. In this respect post-nomadic empires were like nomadic empires. The post-nomadic armies, however, consisted almost entirely of men unaccompanied by women and children. Whereas in the Mongol hordes in India women and children were routinely brought along in great numbers as non-combatants, it now became merely an exceptional privilege of rulers and commanders to bring parts of their harems along, and these would be removed from the battle scene and kept at a distance, together with the baggage, disabled horses, and old men.¹⁹⁹

The most important and revolutionary feature of the post-nomadic armies in Hind was, without doubt, the increased and heavy reliance on cavalry, more specifically mounted archers, which considerably

¹⁹⁶ Lieberman, 'Local Integration and Eurasian Analogies', pp. 480–7.

¹⁹⁷ Lombard, *Carrefour*, III, pp. 55, 130–1.

¹⁹⁸ Pigeaud, *Java in the Fourteenth Century*, IV, p. 464.

¹⁹⁹ *FS*, p. 354; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 346; *TMS*, p. 129; *TF*, p. 323; *TA*, p. 480.

reduced the use of the war-elephants of sedentary India.²⁰⁰ But the enormous cavalries (reportedly running into the hundreds of thousands) that, for example, 'Alā' ad-Dīn Khalajī or Muhammad bin Tughluq maintained, were broken up in separate contingents among a great number of assignment-holders (*iqṭā'ḍārs*), while only a much more limited number would be stationed at Delhi, and we rarely hear of a contingent of horsemen larger than 30,000.²⁰¹ To the extent that they were larger, such contingents would face the same fodder problems that prevented Mongol armies from campaigning in the subcontinent for long without engaging in reckless plunder. Next to fodder, equally important for the survival of post-nomadic empires was unhindered access to a regular supply of good horses. The chronicles occasionally mention Indian-bred horses, with lancers and spear-men in steel armour and helmets.²⁰² Most commonly, however, they emphasize the importance of imported warhorses that 'fly like the wind on the surface of water,' particularly Arabian and Turki thoroughbreds.²⁰³ These would be relatively expensive 'in the interior of Hind' but every conceivable measure was taken, by the Bahmanī as well as by the Vijayanagara kings, to procure them and safeguard their overseas supplies. The skills in horsemanship appear to have been related to the availability of horses. These skills would decline in the south and east of India, and even the Muslims of the Deccan, while renowned swordsmen, were considered inferior as cavalry to those of the north.²⁰⁴ Yet, everywhere the most important distinction drawn was that between the imperial cavalries and the peasant hordes of almost limitless proportions which were 'fighting on foot in the manner of the people of Hindūstān (*khalq-i-hindūstān*).'²⁰⁵ At

²⁰⁰ *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 95–110. Armoured war-elephants have been used both in the Indo-Islamic and Vijayanagara armies throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and they were still a cause of great concern for Timur; their numbers, however, by the fifteenth century were down from earlier centuries, ranging usually in the hundreds, and only rarely in the thousands (*TFS*, pp. 148, 150, 262, 449; *KF*, pp. 101, 162–3; *TF*, pp. 286, 310; *TA*, pp. 459, 475–6).

²⁰¹ *TFS*, pp. 242, 267, 490; *TF*, pp. 114, 131; Siddiqi and Ahmad, *Fourteenth Century Arab Account*, p. 37; *TFS*, pp. 237–8; *TA*, p. 459.

²⁰² *FS*, pp. 203–8; *TFS*, p. 257.

²⁰³ *TFS*, pp. 148, 150, 262, 449; *KF*, pp. 101, 162–3; *TF*, pp. 286, 310; *TA*, pp. 459, 475–6.

²⁰⁴ *TF*, II, p. 102.

²⁰⁵ *TMS*, pp. 110, 114, 129; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 353; *TFS*, pp. 193–4, 237–8, 298. The numbers of peasant soldiers run as high as 900,000; cf. *FS*, pp. 228, 286; *TF*, pp. 286–7; *TA*, pp. 32, 34, 104; *TFS*, pp. 114,

times, in effect, the entire countryside could be mobilized, involving millions, but this would represent a different level of military activity, more in the nature of an agrarian uprising, with the potential to disrupt revenue collection but not to win battles. The post-nomadic cavalries were not only much more mobile but their movements were tightly coordinated, and an entire logistical support system was put in place to maintain them in the field, including a postal relay system and the Banjara bullock trains which supplied grain, opium, koknār, salt, and oil.²⁰⁶ Moreover, these centuries of the horsewarrior revolution also brought improved siege technology associated with gunpowder (mines and devices like explosive and fire-throwing bamboo tubes) and the trebuchet or 'western mangonel,' known as 'maghribi,' which came to India from China, through the Mongols.²⁰⁷ Sedentary India was a land of fortresses, large and small, made of stone and mud, but early gunpowder and trebuchets gave advantages to the besiegers. They are part of the explanation of why virtually every significant fort in central and southern India fell to Malik Kafur, the commander of 'Alā' ad-Dīn Khalajī.

The post-nomadic empires had few or no formal and enduring institutions, and revolved around *fitna* or 'strife,' a mixture of military and political activity, among competing horsewarrior elites which were recruited from the frontier with cash, and which could rise or disintegrate almost overnight.²⁰⁸ The elites themselves were poly-ethnic groupings, without formal criteria of admission, and without fixed hierarchies, offices, or succession rules. There were specific royal insignia and privileges—the canopy, drums, flags, throne, the khutba read and the coinage minted in the name of the king, elephants to ride on in procession, and others—and there was an elaborate dress-code (subject to change over time), distinguishing royalty from titled nobles, and titled nobles from each other and non-nobles, and there

201–4; Major, *India, III*, p. 27; *TF, II*, p. 310. On peasant armies, see also Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy*, pp. 2–4, 7, 10, 13. There were, apart from these, Indian armies with large numbers of horses (see e.g. *TFS*, pp. 213, 277, 329; *FS*, pp. 249, 311–2; *TF*, p. 115; *FS*, pp. 370–78, 394–8 ff.; *TFSa*, pp. 62, 206).

²⁰⁶ *TFS*, pp. 330–2; Elliot and Dowson, *History of India, IV*, pp. 461, 466; *FS*, pp. 485–6; *TF*, pp. 181, 183–4, 284, 346–7; *TKJ*, pp. 181, 197, 202; *TA*, p. 561; *TS*, p. 75.

²⁰⁷ J. J. L. Gommans, 'War-horse and gunpowder in India, c. 1000–1850', in: J. Black (ed.), *War in the Early Modern World* (London, 1999), pp. 112–3.

²⁰⁸ Cf. *Al-Hind, II*, pp. 182–3.

was a highly developed and ritualized system of *khilats* or 'robes of honour,' including some received from the Caliph together with a diploma of recognition.²⁰⁹ A carry-over from the nomadic past, there was the 'Tartar' privilege of displaying the *tugha*, a pennon made of the tail of the Tibetan yak, with drums and flags, which was reserved for higher-ranking amirs under the Bahmanīs.²¹⁰ There were, however, by the later fifteenth century, barely the beginnings of a formal ranking system of quantified mansabs as was developed later by the Mughals and in which the Rajputs would be incorporated as well.²¹¹ These early Indo-Islamic empires which preceded the empire of the Mughals were still immensely volatile. What is striking about them is not only the geographical mobility of their elite groupings, but also the pivotal role played by cash resources in holding them together, for as long as they lasted. Having seized the throne, new rulers would typically attempt to consolidate their position by profuse liberality, some ordering elephants to be equipped with ballistic machines on their backs which would scatter huge heaps of gold and silver pieces among the populace during processions.²¹² 'The household troops,' we read,

'loved nothing better than a change of regime, for it had always been customary that on such an occasion they would receive six months' salary from the treasury; indeed, such a trifle could buy the service of those dissolute slaves who had no sense of gratitude and honour.'²¹³

Historians of the period remind us again and again that 'all the affairs in this world are resolved with gold' and 'wealth and *fitna* go together,' while victory can be achieved 'by the sword or through gold.'²¹⁴

Without a specific law of succession, dynastic continuity was in constant jeopardy, the succession process often becoming tantamount to a tortuous sequence of plots, counterplots, assassinations, and the blinding of sons, grandsons and selected relatives. 'Alā' ad-Dīn Khalajī,

²⁰⁹ *TFS*, pp. 236, 246; *TF*, pp. 89–90, 138–9, 146, 282; *FS*, p. 293; *TA*, p. 565; *TFS*, pp. 491–3; *TFS4*, p. 273.

²¹⁰ *TF*, p. 320.

²¹¹ We read of such an incipient mansab system sporadically under the later Bahmanīs and Lodīs (*TF*, p. 320).

²¹² *FS*, p. 235; *TFS*, pp. 243–4, 251–2; *TF*, p. 133; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 238, 395–6.

²¹³ *TF*, p. 129.

²¹⁴ *TFS*, pp. 222, 224, 238, 243–4, 280, 282–4, 284–7; *FS*, p. 235; *FS*, p. 532.

for instance, had two or three sons born to him every year, resulting in complete confusion when he died, with ultimately most of them ending up either being assassinated or blinded and sent to the prison-fortress of Gwalior.²¹⁵ The *ordre vécu* of the court was intense paranoia, with suspicions about everyone's intentions running deep. It was an Indian custom that whoever failed to attend at the Sultan's darbar for three days or more, with or without excuse, would not be allowed to enter again, unless with special permission of the Sultan himself.²¹⁶ Someone leaving the court without formally taking leave was understood to be offended and preparing himself for revolt. With many on the brink of revolt, a revolt would only be considered successful when the Sultan's head was severed from his body and placed on a spear to be shown to all, first in the army camp, then in the capital.²¹⁷

If institutional indeterminacy pervaded the post-nomadic empires of Hind, the peripatetic exercise of power was another feature which they all seem to have shared. Muhammad bin Tughluq spent the greater part of his life in military camps.²¹⁸ Most other rulers were often on campaign, sometimes for one or two years, or more, particularly in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when communications could be broken off with the capital for months or a whole year.²¹⁹ Firuz Shah Tughluq stayed away on a campaign to Bengal and Orissa for two years and seven months, losing his way on the return journey through jungles and mountains, when for six months there was no news from him and the viceregent had great difficulty keeping things under control.²²⁰ The same Sultan got lost in the Rann of Cutch, and was again cut off from Delhi for six months, altogether spending two-and-a-half years on the trip, while the viceregent pretended he had good news.²²¹ In the fifteenth century campaigns were no longer conducted over such great distances, but Sultan Mahmud Khalajī of Malwa (1436–1469), for instance,

²¹⁵ *TFS*, pp. 261, 381–2, 392, 394. For succession problems, see also: *TFS*, pp. 245–6, 428; *TF*, pp. 89, 109, 144–5, 149–50, 236–8; *FS*, p. 241; *TFS4*, p. 96; *TMS*, pp. 16, 193.

²¹⁶ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 218.

²¹⁷ *TFS*, pp. 235, 276; *FS*, pp. 224–6.

²¹⁸ *TF*, p. 133; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 338.

²¹⁹ E.g. *TFS*, pp. 218, 220, 223, 226, 228, 230, 270, 450.

²²⁰ *TFS4*, pp. 144, 171–4.

²²¹ *TFS4*, pp. 194–213, 250.

still took to the field almost every year, 'so that his tent became his home, and his resting place the field of battle.'²²²

We do not know much about the educational level and general sophistication of the elites of these empires, especially in the case of Vijayanagara. It appears to have fluctuated widely. Muhammad bin Tughluq was considered to be the most accomplished ruler of his time for his knowledge of Persian and Arabic literature, philosophy, history, science, as well as for his handwriting and composition.²²³ 'Alā' ad-Dīn Khalajī, by contrast, could neither read nor write, and appears to have been largely uneducated in other respects as well, and we can safely assume that most of the New Muslims, whether Mongols or Afghans, were illiterate and as yet ignorant of the adab of court life. Across the board, the Indo-Islamic elites of these centuries were overwhelmingly worldly in their orientation. Even Muhammad bin Tughluq had 'no interest in holy books' and was openly scornful of the religious clergy, putting political expediency before divine law in order to enhance the royal dignity. The Islamic prohibition against wine and other intoxicants was commonly violated, often openly.²²⁴ If some rulers implemented draconian measures to enforce this prohibition it was most often (although not always) for political reasons, since wine was one of the main causes of *fitna*—which explains why in such cases the prohibition was enforced among both Muslims and Hindus. Also in violation of the Sharia, the nobles often devoted much time to large, cosmopolitan harems, with women 'of all nations' purchased from as far away as Africa, Arabia, Russia, the Caucasus, and even China, or demanded as tribute from subjected Hindu rulers and notable merchants, in numbers which ran into the hundreds and thousands.²²⁵ Harem politics, and matrimonial alliance building, were often decisive where religious politics was

²²² *TF*, II, p. 254.

²²³ *TFS*, pp. 454–66; *TF*, p. 133.

²²⁴ *TFS*, pp. 78, 145–7, 183, 190–2, 224, 247, 262–5, 270–1, 282, 284–6, 291, 335, 384, 387, 392–3; *KF*, pp. 10–11; Siddiqi and Ahmad, *Fourteenth Century Arab Account*, pp. 46, 56; Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, IV, p. 446; Stewart, *Malfuzat Timuri*, p. 89; *TF*, pp. 285, 295, 307, 333, 337; *TF*, II, p. 341; *TA*, pp. 235, 492, 494, 649; Sadhu, *Medieval Kashmir*, pp. 137–8, 157.

²²⁵ *TFS*, pp. 258, 274–5, 392, 408, 410 ff.; Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, III, p. 445; *FS*, pp. 243, 356–7, 432; *TF*, pp. 103, 115, 182, 301, 306–7, 309, 312, 315, 323, 331, 334; *TF*, II, p. 255; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 346; *TA*, pp. 224, 235, 480, 494, 542–7, 552–3, 570.

not.²²⁶ Most rulers, aware that those whose authority was not feared were despised, resorted to methods of intimidation that would not be condoned by the Sharia. Jalāl ad-Dīn Khalajī was actually condemned by his nobles when, appealing to the Sharia, he abolished ordeals by fire and the torture of revenue officials, while releasing thugs from prison instead of depriving them of sight.²²⁷ But ‘Alā’ ad-Dīn Khalajī, who frequently resorted to the most barbaric tortures and executions and on this account had a deserved reputation for cruelty, came to be regarded as ‘one of the best of Sultans,’ and Ibn Battuta, decades later, still reported that ‘the ahl al-Hind praise him a lot’ because of the way he maintained order.²²⁸ Some of the most gory and ‘spectacular’ practices, such as the flaying alive or impaling of prisoners, or playing horsepole with the cut-off heads of vanquished enemies,²²⁹ or the building of turrets of skulls in the Mongol style,²³⁰ while still favoured by Muhammad bin Tughluq, appear to have been phased out, or at least disappear from the record, from Firuz Shah Tughluq’s reign onwards.²³¹ Firuz Shah Tughluq carved regulations on the masjid in Firuzabad which announced the end of mutilating prisoners, Hindu or Muslim, and of torture, the cutting off of hands and feet, noses and ears, the flaying, crushing and burning of prisoners, and so on.²³² Many forms of mutilation however remained common throughout the subcontinent.²³³

Meanwhile, a sense of belonging to a Muslim community was taking root. As the result of centuries of immigration of shaykhs and ‘ulamā’ from the Islamic heartlands there had been a steady growth

²²⁶ *TFS*, pp. 177, 233, 243–5; *TMS*, p. 62; *TF*, pp. 182, 315, 109; *TFS*, p. 218; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 271–9; Sadhu, *Medieval Kashmir*, p. 199.

²²⁷ *TFS*, pp. 189–90, 211–2; *TF*, pp. 89–91.

²²⁸ *TF*, p. 95; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 184–5; see also *TFS*, pp. 239, 277, 289, 318; *KF*, pp. 18–19.

²²⁹ We read of one gallant Rajput, Rai Hammir, about to perform jauhar at Ranthanbhur, who took the precaution of first shaving his head in order to avert this humiliating fate (*FS*, p. 266).

²³⁰ *TFS*, pp. 320–1; *FS*, pp. 280–1, 297; *TF*, p. 295; *TA*, p. 664. The practice of making platforms of heads was imitated by Hindus on at least one occasion in 1417 (*TF*, p. 320).

²³¹ *TFS*, pp. 253, 287, 320–1, 390, 419, 448, 496; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 216, 218, 290–2, 298, 321, 323–4, 330–1, 333, 339, 354; *TF*, pp. 133, 150; *FS*, pp. 200, 271, 280–1, 297.

²³² *TF*, p. 150.

²³³ *TFS*, p. 249; *TF*, pp. 102, 124, 241–3, 284, 304, 306, 320, 338–9, 343; *TA*, pp. 76, 162, 170, 492, 664, 678, 744, 746–7.

of a wide range of Islamic religious organizations, including Sufi orders and madrasas that taught Islamic law and other branches of scholarship. From the first decade of the fourteenth century, the dynastic fortune of Indo-Islamic states came to be closely associated with that of the Chishtis, a homegrown order of Sufis.²³⁴ The Indo-Islamic chronicles of this time do express strong sentiments that Muslims, because of their adherence to the true religion, were to be treated differently from non-believers, and that in fact the whole purpose of the imperial endeavour was to make the world safe for Islam, which was a civilizing mission of sorts. The result was a theory of dual citizenship. It was deemed to be contrary to the law of Islam and against humanity to invade without reason a country inhabited by Muslims, or that a Muslim ruler should shed the blood of Muslims without reason, or that Muslims should fight amongst themselves.²³⁵ Thus Chingiz Khan was denounced for killing true believers.²³⁶ Whereas Jalāl ad-Dīn Khalajī had no problem with killing Mongols but affected he would renounce the throne if he would have to spill Muslim blood (*khūnhāy musalmānān*).²³⁷ Tīmūr, at Lonī, took the Muslims apart from those to be killed.²³⁸ Killing the *ahl-i-islām*, in short, was a religiously sanctioned taboo, preserving their lives was a virtue.²³⁹

What was to be done with the Hindu majority population? The learned opinion of 'death or Islam' for Hindus was never meant to be translated into practice. But the Hindus had to be made *kharājguzār*, 'revenue-paying,' by threat and humiliation,²⁴⁰ their idols destroyed—and these aims were diligently pursued.²⁴¹ When we read that 'the

²³⁴ Cf. S. Digby, 'The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Mediaeval India', in: M. Gaborieau (ed.), *Islam et Société en Asie du Sud* (Paris, 1986), pp. 57–77.

²³⁵ *TA*, pp. 203, 245, 252, 478.

²³⁶ Stewart, *Malfūzat Timury*, p. 28.

²³⁷ *TFS*, pp. 185–7; *TF*, p. 90.

²³⁸ *ZN*, II, pp. 66–71.

²³⁹ *FS*, pp. 496, 512, 560–1; *TFS*, pp. 154–5, 235, 265–6; *TMS*, p. 203; *TF*, p. 323.

²⁴⁰ *TFS*, pp. 268, 290–1, 297.

²⁴¹ We have iconoclastic decrees which aimed to denude entire regions of their 'idols,' not unlike those that were recently issued by the Taliban/Al-Qaida in Afghanistan. For instance, in 817/1414 an officer of Ahmad Shah I received the order to destroy all idolatrous temples and establish Muslim authority throughout Gujarat; this he carried out with such determination that 'the mawas and goras were not heard of again in the entire kingdom' (*TF*, II, pp. 184–5). Another example: Firuz Shah Tughluq prohibited pictures on garments, figures and portraits on

flame of the lamp of Islam illuminates the darkness of Hindustan (*ẓalmat-i-hindūstān*)' this is not to be interpreted as a statement that the Indo-Islamic empires actively propagated the Islamic religion or adopted a policy of conversion but more as a metaphor of religious legitimisation.²⁴² Native conversion was becoming more widespread, to be sure, but mainly in peripheral areas of the subcontinent and not in the imperial capitals. The earliest evidence on conversion dates from the eleventh century and comes from Batiya, the Panjab and adjacent hillareas bordering on Kashmir.²⁴³ Tribes of the Koh-i-Jud and the Kokhars in the northeast Panjab converted during the fourteenth century.²⁴⁴ It appears that conversion had proceeded far among the Sindians in the Thatta region by the reign of Firuz Shah Tughluq,²⁴⁵ and that the inhabitants of Cutch converted in 1472.²⁴⁶ In Kashmir some conversion had occurred by the early fourteenth century in the urban centres, among traders and artisans, some service jatis, and various military groups, mediated through contacts

bridles, saddles, horse-collars, censers for burning aloewood, flagon cups, basins, curtains, and so on (*FFS*, p. 115). Similar blanket orders were issued in Kashmir by Sikandar Butshikan (Sadhu, *Medieval Kashmir*, p. 54; *TA*, pp. 647–9; *TF*, II, p. 341). On iconoclasm see also *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 294–333. The evidence on iconoclasm in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is very extensive, and much of it is contemporary; see *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica* (Calcutta, 1937–38); *TFS*, pp. 148, 213, 251, 334; *TMS*, p. 76; *KF*, pp. 26, 48–49, 54, 155–9; *FS*, pp. 285, 289–90, 326; *TF*, pp. 147, 183–4, 186–7, 189, 298, 320–1, 323, 353–4; *TF*, II, pp. 179–80, 185, 247, 306, 341, 350–1; *TFSa*, pp. 170, 185–6, 304, 373, 379–83; *FFS*, pp. 110, 113–4; *IM*, pp. 27–35 (Letter no. 14); *TKJ*, pp. 194, 197, 204, 207, 216; Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, IV, pp. 439, 447; *TA*, pp. 177–8, 203, 220–1, 458, 512–4, 531–2, 647–9, 655, 690; Sadhu, *Medieval Kashmir*, p. 54; Stewart, *Malfuzat Timury*, p. 14. On the iconoclastic orders of the Taliban (who smashed anything in the National Museum in Kabul with a human or animal image that they could lay their hands on): C. Bohlen, 'Archaeologists and Curators Work to Patch up a Ravaged Nation's Heritage', *The New York Times*, April 15, 2002, p. B1; S. Lopez, 'Afghanistan: Iconoclastic Fury Unleashed Again', *ILAS Newsletter*, 27 (March, 2002), p. 45 (which refers to Omar's decree of 26 February 2001 to destroy all the statues in Afghanistan); J. van Krieken, 'A Turn-Around for Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage?', *ILAS Newsletter*, 27 (March, 2002), p. 15. These decrees were the result of Al-Qaida, hence Wahhabite, influence and a way to diminish a separate Afghan identity. This does not mean that iconoclasm was politically motivated, as some scholars suggest. For instance, the lengthy article by R. M. Eaton, 'Temple desecration and Indo-Muslim States', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 11, 3 (2000), pp. 283–319 confuses politically motivated temple-desecration (also practiced by Hindus) with religious iconoclasm.

²⁴² *KF*, p. 113.

²⁴³ Cf. *Al-Hind*, II, p. 123.

²⁴⁴ Siddiqui, 'Politics and Conditions', pp. 303–4.

²⁴⁵ *TFSa*, pp. 233–5.

²⁴⁶ *TF*, II, pp. 198–9.

with Khurasan and Turkistan.²⁴⁷ The Muslim ruling house of Kashmir continued to marry Dogra Rajput princesses from Jammu, who retained their Hindu religion, until 1383.²⁴⁸ Numerous Sayyids and Sufis fleeing the Mongols played a role in the conversions in Kashmir.²⁴⁹ Between 1372 and 1383, the visits of Sayyid Ali Hamadani, with his many disciples, of the Kubrāwīya order, had a major impact on the religious transformation of Kashmir and the Islamization of the often still nominally Muslim nobility.²⁵⁰ To variable degrees the greater part of the population of the Kashmir valley converted in the reign of Sikandar Butshikan (1389–1413), although some apostasy occurred later among brahmans who had been forced to convert in order to be allowed to stay in Kashmir.²⁵¹ In one other region, in eastern Bengal, conversion occurred on an extensive scale among peripheral forest tribes which were gradually being settled as peasants during a period of land reclamation made possible by the eastward shifting course of the Ganges and its tributary rivers.²⁵² Here, again, Sufis and ‘ulamā’ pioneers were instrumental in the religious transformation which accompanied sedentarization. The proliferation of numerous rural mosques in the countryside indicates that this process was well under way by the later fifteenth century and in the period of Raja Ganesh.

Outside of these peripheral regions of the subcontinent, and outside of the coastal regions of Malabar, Canara, the Konkan, Gujarat, the Coromandel, Bengal, and the Malay-Indonesian archipelago,²⁵³ conversion among Hindus did not occur on a large collective scale. In individual cases, various forms of pressure, and even force, were sometimes deployed to make vanquished or besieged Hindu rulers or chiefs convert, commonly with their families.²⁵⁴ Among such rulers apostasy at a later stage was not uncommon, and was then regarded

²⁴⁷ Ahmad, ‘Conversions to Islam’, pp. 6–7.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁴⁹ Raffiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir*, p. 213.

²⁵⁰ Ahmad, ‘Conversions to Islam’, pp. 11–13.

²⁵¹ Raffiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir*, pp. 12, 16; and see Sufi, *Islamic Culture in Kashmir*, pp. 32–33, 35–36, 38, 42–44; R. L. Hangloo, ‘Accepting Islam and abandoning Hinduism: a study of proselytization process in medieval Kashmir’, *Islamic Culture*, LXXI, 1 (1997), pp. 91–110; *TF*, II, pp. 337–8, 341–2; *TA*, pp. 650, 654–5, 659.

²⁵² Eaton, *Bengal Frontier*.

²⁵³ For which see Chapter V.

²⁵⁴ *KF*, p. 132; *FS*, p. 391; *TFS*, p. 484; *TA*, pp. 255, 258, 276; *TF*, II, pp. 198–9, 202.

as tantamount to rebellion. Various tests were in vogue to gauge the sincerity of the convert. Tīmūr recalls:

‘The Raja of Jammu, who was wounded and prisoner . . . agreed to pay certain sums of money and to become a Musulman if I would spare his life. I instantly ordered him to be taught the creed, and he repeated it and became a Muhammadan. Among these infidels there is no greater crime and abomination than eating the flesh of a cow or killing a cow, but he ate the flesh in the company of Musulmans. When he had thus been received into the fold of the faithful, I ordered my surgeons to attend to his wounds, and I honoured him with a robe and royal favours.’²⁵⁵

Elsewhere, some other chiefs were summarily executed for refusing to convert.²⁵⁶ It is also on record that fiscal exemptions led some Hindus to convert in Delhi under Firuz Shah Tughluq.²⁵⁷ Individual conversion could, of course, also be voluntary, and this appears to have been especially encouraged. ‘It is the custom in al-Hind,’ writes Ibn Battuta, ‘that when an individual wants to convert to Islam, people introduce him to the Sultan, who dresses him in a nice robe and gives him a golden necklace and bracelets, of a value proportionate to his rank.’²⁵⁸ Of considerable numerical importance was probably the conversion of slaves and other captives, including harem inmates. Slaves had to be obtained ‘among infidels’ (*min al-kuffār*), since there was a prohibition against enslaving Muslims—a prohibition that was enforced, albeit imperfectly.²⁵⁹ There is abundant evidence that during military campaigns large numbers of such ‘infidels’ were made captives, especially women and children, and that these were often enslaved.²⁶⁰ An unknown number of these slaves were transported westwards, as had been the case in earlier centuries.²⁶¹ Tīmūr still carried off great numbers of enslaved captives to Samarqand. But in Hind itself there arose numerous specialized slave

²⁵⁵ Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, III, p. 472.

²⁵⁶ *TA*, p. 276; *TF*, II, p. 202.

²⁵⁷ *FFS*, pp. 120–1.

²⁵⁸ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 197.

²⁵⁹ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 236–8, 252, 296, 389; *TFSA*, p. 234; *IM*, pp. 229–335 (Letter no. 134); *TA*, p. 215; Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, III, p. 399.

²⁶⁰ *FS*, pp. 227, 280–1; *TF*, pp. 251–2, 511–2; *ZN*, II, pp. 64–66, 71–75; Siddiqi and Ahmad, *Fourteenth Century Arab Account*, pp. 41, 44, 51–52; *TFSA*, pp. 267–73, 335; *TF*, p. 299.

²⁶¹ *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 126, 180; *IM*, pp. 212–3.

markets (*bāzār-i-burda*), and by all accounts slavery was ubiquitous in a variety of contexts, including the military, and especially the domestic one.²⁶² We are told there were 12,000 slaves at the court of Muhammad bin Tughluq.²⁶³ There were 180,000 slaves, according to 'Affī, in Delhi and the various iqṭā'as under Firuz Shah Tughluq.²⁶⁴ In the Bahmanī empire there were 60,000 or 70,000 captives from Vijayanagara, mostly women.²⁶⁵ How many of these converted to Islam is not stated, but there are indications that many of them may have, possibly all of them. Of Muhammad bin Tughluq's slave girls, it is stated, 'many knew the Qur'ān by heart.'²⁶⁶ Firuz Shah Tughluq, during his forty-year reign, ordered all his iqṭā'dars to collect slaves wherever they were at war and send them to court; many of these, we are told, learned to read, and some entered into religious studies, memorizing the Qur'ān, and going on pilgrimage to Mecca, while they were employed in all sorts of occupations and married off to each other, and often sent back into the provinces.²⁶⁷ Village chiefs and headmen 'were torn from their old lands' in Sannam, Samana and Kaithal by Muhammad bin Tughluq, and carried off to Delhi, where they were converted, with their wives and children.²⁶⁸ In another instance, we are informed that eleven captive sons of a Hindu king became 'Muslim amirs.'²⁶⁹ And when Tīmūr conquered Sarsatti,

'all infidel Hindus were slain, their wives and children made prisoners . . . The soldiers then returned, bringing with them several thousand Hindu women and children who became Muhammadans, and repeated the creed.'²⁷⁰

If this happened on a large scale, the conclusion can only be that the high degree of militarization of the post-nomadic empires was a significant factor in the conversion to Islam.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the post-nomadic empires of Hind differed from nomadic empires in the sense that they were

²⁶² Cf. *TFS*, pp. 314, 322, 384.

²⁶³ Siddiqi and Ahmad, *Fourteenth Century Arab Account*, p. 44.

²⁶⁴ *TFS*, pp. 267–73, 335.

²⁶⁵ *TF*, pp. 299, 315.

²⁶⁶ Siddiqi and Ahmad, *Fourteenth Century Arab Account*, p. 44.

²⁶⁷ *TFS*, pp. 267–73, 335.

²⁶⁸ *TFS*, pp. 483–4.

²⁶⁹ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 320.

²⁷⁰ Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, III, pp. 427–8.

'monsoon empires,' no longer dependent on an arid ecosystem which set severe limits to agriculture and necessitated extensive pastoralism but on a climate with a rainy season in fertile river plains that were noted for their agricultural abundance and teeming populations.²⁷¹ Straddling the worlds of the nomadic frontier and settled agriculture, the main challenge of the post-nomadic state thus became the raising of landrevenue. As yet, the notion of a fiscal bureaucracy with discrete official positions was weakly developed, if it existed at all, in the Indo-Islamic states as under the Kakatiya and Vijayanagara kings.²⁷² Therefore, a lot remained dependent on personal ties and ad-hoc contests of strengths. Wherever collection-garrisons or *thanas* could be maintained, a process of bargaining would occur, and a compromise would be struck with the local zamindars, big and small, and tributary allies.²⁷³ Nothing is more striking in the chronicles than the regularity with which campaigns had to be organized or other measures had to be taken to enforce revenue or tribute payment agreements.²⁷⁴ Some rulers levelled all village mudfortresses, with their surrounding moats and jungles, to facilitate revenue collection in particularly refractory regions.²⁷⁵ On the other hand, even though uniform measurements and regulations were nowhere assured and fiscal docility had to be enforced, the post-nomadic empires were often successful in stimulating the expansion of agriculture, reclaiming wasteland, and improving irrigation through canals and tanks, as well as protecting and controlling trade.²⁷⁶ With the increase of mints, more and more revenue collection was becoming monetized.²⁷⁷ Prebendal assignments of monetized revenue to military commanders

²⁷¹ Shihāb ad-Dīn al-'Umarī writes that 'Al-Hind is famous for the affluence of life . . .' (Siddiqi and Ahmad, *Fourteenth Century Arab Account*, p. 58); and Amir Khusrau: 'from the point of view of climate, Hind, with all its luxurious growth, is representative of Paradise' (R. Nath and F. Gwaliari, *India as seen by Amir Khusrau* (Jaipur, 1981), p. 54).

²⁷² For the Kakatiyas, see Talbot, *Precolonial India*, p. 8; for Vijayanagara, see Stein, *Vijayanagara*, pp. 64–65.

²⁷³ *TA*, pp. 458, 481, 528; *FS*, p. 530; *KF*, p. 55.

²⁷⁴ *TF*, pp. 131, 148, 153; *TF*, II, p. 192; *FS*, p. 384; *TMS*, p. 203; *TA*, p. 541.

²⁷⁵ Roy, *Niamatullah's History of the Afghans*, p. 111.

²⁷⁶ Talbot, *Precolonial India*, p. 99; Stein, *Vijayanagara*, *passim*; *TFS*, pp. 287–9, 304–5, 385, 428, 473, 481; *TF*, pp. 102, 134, 136–7, 150; *TFS4*, pp. 60, 129–130, 296; *TFS*, pp. 251, 284, 305, 307–10, 315–18, 385, 399, 493, 495, 498–503, 506; *FS*, pp. 242–3, 293, 356–7; Manz, *Tamerlane*, p. 116; Masson, *Narrative of Various Journeys*, III, p. 162; Siddiqui, 'Water Works', pp. 52–77.

²⁷⁷ Nelson Wright, *Coinage and Metrology*; Stein, *Vijayanagara*, p. 47.

became a feature of revenue systems throughout the subcontinent—they were called *iqṭāʿ* in the Islamic states, *nāyankaramu* or *amara nāyankara* under the Kakatiya and Vijayanagara kings—and, even though the details of revenue administration within these prebends varied and the amount of auditing and supervision fluctuated, overall they reflect a dramatically enhanced rationalization of the fiscal system.²⁷⁸

The monsoon climate, while beneficent to agriculture, posed its own set of hazards and limitations, and it put specific pressures on the administrative continuity of the post-nomadic empires. As we have seen, the monsoon limited the scope of pastoralism, particularly the raising of horses, and even the use of cavalries was constrained by the relative scarcity of good grazing lands.²⁷⁹ The torrents of rain would harm the hoofs of animals, and often led to the outbreak of diseases and subsequent deaths of many horses, just as it led to the deaths of many people.²⁸⁰ Fortresses were badly affected by moist winds in the rainy season, and quickly became overwhelmed by excessive vegetation growth and infested with rats and snakes.²⁸¹ The seasonal monsoon rains also made roads difficult to use, would bring campaigning to a stop and cause horses and even elephants to get stuck in the mud, while making rivers difficult to cross.²⁸² Agriculture itself, and the life of innumerable peasants, for all we know, was a gamble on the monsoon. Even in the best of times, poor peasants in India, as elsewhere, often lived on the verge of starvation and were haunted by the primordial fear of extinction throughout much of their lives.²⁸³ Nikitin, travelling through the fifteenth-century Deccan, observed: 'The land is overstocked with people; but those in the country are very miserable, whilst the nobles are extremely opulent and delight in luxury.'²⁸⁴ There is substantial evidence that

²⁷⁸ Talbot, *Precolonial India*, p. 173; Stein, *Vijayanagara*, pp. 64–65; *FS*, pp. 221, 223; *KF*, p. 8; *TFS*, pp. 278, 389, 390, 484–7; *TMS*, pp. 98, 131; *TFS4*, p. 339; *II*, pp. 68–73.

²⁷⁹ See pp. 90–93, and *Al-Hind*, II, s.v. Horse(s).

²⁸⁰ Sontheimer, *Pastoral Deities*, p. 113; Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, III, pp. 417, 420; *ZN*, II, pp. 49–55; *TMS*, p. 104; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 326.

²⁸¹ *KF*, pp. 28–29.

²⁸² *TFS*, pp. 229, 231, 238, 242–3, 279, 300, 399; *TF*, pp. 145–6, 286; *TF*, II, p. 185; *TFS4*, p. 112; *TA*, pp. 197, 199, 201, 508, 514;

²⁸³ Cf. Scott, *In Famine Land*, pp. 1–2, 7, 10, 14, 16.

²⁸⁴ Major, *India*, III, p. 14.

in medieval times drought-famines were among the most common catastrophes affecting the peasantry in most parts of Hind, often with dreadful severity, leading to incalculable numbers of deaths, and having a deep impact upon the settlement histories of many regions.²⁸⁵ This is not to say that we have anything approaching a complete record of the occurrence of famine in medieval times. Famine, like epidemic disease, is mostly mentioned in so far as it affected the progress of military campaigns and posed a real or potential threat to armies. It seems quite possible that many famines have not been recorded at all. Some may have been so devastating as to leave no-one alive who could pass on the memory. Even contemporary rulers may have been unaware of some of them. Muhammad bin Tughluq, on one occasion, only noticed that he had inadvertently marched his army into a famine area when he observed with surprise, at a distance of only a few days from

²⁸⁵ The medieval evidence certainly does not agree with the relatively benign picture of famine in pre-British India that is presented in M. Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London and New York, 2001), p. 285. The Indo-Islamic chronicles point at the following: a severe famine in the reign of Jalal ad-Din Khalaji was caused by a total failure of the monsoon over two consecutive years in Delhi and environs (*TFS*, p. 212; *FS*, pp. 212–6); another famine caused by a lack of rain over perhaps as many as seven years in a row, and aggravated by overtaxation, devastated entire provinces of ‘Hind and Sind’ under Muhammad bin Tughluq, badly affecting Delhi as well (*TFS*, pp. 473, 481–2; 484–5; *TF*, pp. 137–8; *FS*, p. 443; *TMS*, pp. 106, 113; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 290, 296, 299, 341–5, 372); a famine raged in Khandesh and Gondwana around 1370 (*TF*, II, p. 278); a deadly famine caused by drought occurred in Thatta and parts of Gujarat in the reign of Firuz Shah Tughluq (*TFS*, pp. 199–219); a great drought-famine occurred in Delhi and the Doab in 1411 (*TF*, p. 161); another severe drought-famine (*qaht-i-mahlak*) occurred in 1424 in the cities of Hindustan (*TMS*, p. 203); the great Durga Devi drought-famine devastated the Deccan in 1396–1407 (see above, Chapter III); there was famine again in the Deccan in Mahmud Shah Bahmani’s reign (*TF*, p. 303); a grievous famine caused by the absence of rain for two years occurred in 1420–1 throughout the Deccan (*TF*, p. 322); in 1472–4 a very severe drought and famine occurred throughout the Deccan, Telangana and Maharashtra, leading to the depopulation of many areas and the virtual exhaustion of the Deccan (*TF*, pp. 352–3); in 1482 it was Gujarat’s turn to suffer a failure of the rains and a famine in which many died (*TA*, p. 271; *TF*, II, p. 201); another great famine occurred in 1498 in Bihar (*TF*, p. 182); a ‘terrible drought and famine’ occurred in parts of northern India which led to the migration of large numbers of people into Kashmir in the last days of the reign of Zayn al-‘Abidin (Sadhu, *Medieval Kashmir*, p. 135); and famines are on record in Kashmir itself, in which immense numbers of people died, in a number of years (*TF*, II, p. 352; *TA*, pp. 639, 665, 751; Sadhu, *Medieval Kashmir*, *passim*).

Delhi, that grain prices were skyrocketing.²⁸⁶ We are not well informed about famines outside the Indian subcontinent in these centuries, but it appears that the pattern was not very different here. The 'great famine' in Java of 1426 was of such importance that it has been recorded in the Pararaton chronicle.²⁸⁷ There probably were many more, if the pattern in Java and mainland Southeast Asia was anything like in the seventeenth century.²⁸⁸ In Indo-Islamic chronicles, drought and starvation are denoted by the same word, *qaht*. Drought was usually the main cause of famine, but not always. All places in India visited by Tīmūr, including Delhi, were visited by famine and pestilence which killed many.²⁸⁹ In the great famine of 1033, which caused enormous devastation in Hindustan and Iran, the role of drought was perhaps secondary to the effect of decades of Muslim invasions.²⁹⁰ Drought-famines, however, were frequent enough for medieval chroniclers to evaluate the reign of particular kings in terms of the absence or prevalence of food scarcity.²⁹¹

The actual consequences of drought, apart from crop failure, were multiple. Extreme drought could lead to an explosive expansion of the mosquito population upon the return of the monsoon by decimating its chief predators, and hence to an increase of malaria.²⁹² Locusts were prone to penetrate into certain districts in years of drought and famine—as if to complete the destruction.²⁹³ Drought would drive people to use contaminated water, leading to the outbreak of cholera, 'that awful Oriental epidemic,' which often outran starvation.²⁹⁴ Cattle would die, and hence land could go out of cultivation for much longer than the duration of the actual drought; loads of hides were the only export from famine districts and, with carrion, were boiled and devoured.²⁹⁵ And, apart from widespread

²⁸⁶ *TFS*, p. 481.

²⁸⁷ J. J. Krom, *Hindoe-Javaansche Geschiedenis* ('s-Gravenhage, 1931), pp. 444–5.

²⁸⁸ Cf. N. Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, Volume I, From Early Times to c. 1800* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 490.

²⁸⁹ *TMS*, p. 166.

²⁹⁰ *Al-Hind*, II, p. 126.

²⁹¹ Thus Firuz Shah Tughluq's reign of forty years was celebrated for the relative absence of famine (*TFS*, pp. 199–207, 293, 295). The occurrence of drought and famine was regarded as highly inauspicious (*TFS*, p. 212; *TF*, p. 322).

²⁹² Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, p. 49.

²⁹³ Pottinger, *Travels*, p. 129.

²⁹⁴ Scott, *In Famine Land*, pp. 31, 98, 103.

²⁹⁵ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, p. 372; *TFS*, pp. 207–12; *TF*, p. 322; Scott, *In Famine Land*, pp. 99, 116.

death and starvation, famines would set off major migrations of peasants who would leave their villages, with little knowledge of geography, in search of food and water.²⁹⁶ They could lead to the sale of children into slavery. Barbosa writes about the Coromandel:

'This is the best supplied of all the lands in this part of India, saving only Cambaya, yet in some years it so happens that no rain falls, and that there is such a dearth among them that many die of hunger, and for this reason they sell their children for four or five fanams each. At such seasons the Malabares bring away ship-loads of slaves.'²⁹⁷

In severe famines it was not only the poor peasants who died, but also wealthier individuals and brahmins.²⁹⁸ Various forms of famine relief were provided by rulers and nobles—food distribution, remission of taxes—but all remedies together were inadequate and unable to eradicate famine as the major environmental scourge of medieval Hind.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ Scott, *In Famine Land*, p. 78; *TFS*, pp. 484–7; *TF*, pp. 138, 352–3; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 341–5; Sadhu, *Medieval Kashmir*, p. 135.

²⁹⁷ Duarte Barbosa, II, p. 125.

²⁹⁸ *FS*, pp. 211–16; Sadhu, *Medieval Kashmir*, p. 135; Scott, *In Famine Land*, p. 32.

²⁹⁹ *TFS*, pp. 212, 305–6, 308, 473, 481–2, 484–5; *FS*, pp. 211–16; *TF*, pp. 137, 182, 303, 322; *TF*, II, p. 278; Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, III, pp. 290, 296, 299; *TFS*, pp. 90–93; *TA*, p. 665 and note 2; Sadhu, *Medieval Kashmir*, pp. 103–4, 135–6.

CHAPTER V

ISLAM, TRADE AND THE COASTAL SOCIETIES OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

A Dominican monk reported in 1322 that in Alexandria *funduks* or 'warehouses' were maintained by merchants of Venice, Genoa and Marseilles, and by the Catalans.¹ Here Indian goods could be found for which excessive prices had been paid to the agents of the Mamluk rulers of Egypt. A cargo of pepper that was worth fifty dinars in Cairo was resold at Alexandria to the Europeans for a hundred and thirty dinars.²

This situation of commercial quarantine was not new. Italian merchants have been operating from Alexandria throughout the medieval period, the overland route to the markets of the Indian Ocean being effectively closed to them. The number of Italians who eluded Mamluk control and made their way south always remained quite small. Some Genoese merchants may have penetrated as far as Dongola, far up the Nile, beyond the third Cataract.³ Gulliellmus Adam (d. 1329), another Dominican monk, spent many months on the islands of the Socotra group, which he describes as a station on the route from India to Egypt, and from where he also visited the mainland.⁴ One or two merchants from Venice and Florence made it to Ethiopia by way of the Nile and the Red Sea in the fourteenth century.⁵ And there are said to have been Venetian merchants on the Red Sea islands of Suakin and Massawa during the fifteenth century.⁶ After 1453, when the Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople, and all alternative routes to the east were cut off, official interest in Ethiopia increased, particularly on the part of the Italian republics and the Pope, and the rulers of Spain and Portugal were also beginning to

¹ Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

conduct investigations.⁷ One account of Ethiopia, that of Pietro Rombulo, of about the middle of the fifteenth century and still medieval in its confusion of myth and fact, again fueled the hope of an alliance with Prester John, the Christian ruler of India in the rear of Islam, through which the stranglehold of the Egyptian middlemen might be loosened.⁸

Meanwhile, the first extant Italian account of the overland journey to the land of Prester John dates from 1482.⁹ In that year a Franciscan Friar, Francesco Suriano, received information of some missionaries who had been to Ethiopia, and carefully noted down what they related about their itinerary from Cairo to Barara.¹⁰ According to him, the missionaries had left Cairo and gone by boat up the Nile, against the current, under sail for thirty days. They then stayed for a whole month in a town they called Nachada [Naqāda], on the westbank opposite Qus, as the roads were not safe. Leaving Nachada, they crossed the Nile to the eastside, reaching Acherman [unidentified] in the evening. There they hired camels and in four days reached Chosairo [Quseir], the first port *alla rīpa del Mare Indico*, 'on the shore of the Indian Sea.'¹¹ They then sailed for thirty-five days across this 'Indian Sea,' with favourable wind, until they came to Seuachim [Suakin], a trading town inhabited by Arabs, on an island which was less than a kilometre from the shore. From there they crossed over to the mainland again and bought camels which took them to a town called Menna. After further delays, they traveled for another fifteen days through a desert until they 'arrived half dead at a town called Maria on the frontier of the land of Prester John.'¹² Finally, having reached the Ethiopian capital, they encountered other Italians 'of good repute,' as well as a Burgundian, and a Catalan, who had gone there with Papal letters.¹³ These had all been there for twenty-five years, having had the original intention to seek jewels and precious stones but not being allowed to leave again.

Prester John was merely one myth about the Indian Ocean that

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 5–8, 12; and cf. *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 33–34.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 40–45: Iter S, From Cairo to Barara A.D. 1482.

¹⁰ On Fr. Suriano, see Fra Francesco Suriano, *Treatise on the Holy Land*, transl. from the Italian by Fr. Theophilus Bellorini and Fr. Eugene Hoade (Jerusalem, 1949).

¹¹ Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 43.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 43; text, pp. 40–41.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 44; text, p. 41.

became a casualty of the rapidly expanding geographical knowledge of the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Instead of a Christian ally, Italians and other people from the Mediterranean who wandered the shores of the 'Indian Sea,' with or without Papal letters, found an intensely commercial society which had turned the qibla to Mecca. By the fifteenth century, Christians played merely a very subordinate role in the trade of India. There were still Christian merchants, for instance, who took the Venetian merchandise from the Alexandrian funduks to at-Tūr, Jiddah and Mecca, in armed caravans.¹⁴ There was still some Christian influence in the kingdom of Alwa, in northern Nubia, which fell to the Muslims in the fourteenth century, and such influence, which extended to Suakin, lingered until it was extinguished by the Fungs in the sixteenth century.¹⁵ Pires refers to Ethiopia ('Abyssinia') as a land of Christians,¹⁶ but Prester John himself was threatened by the rising tide of Islam, his external trade relations, and the port towns as well, being already mostly in the hands of Muslims by the later fifteenth century. Everywhere in the 'Indian Sea,' Muslim power and Muslim commercial interests were supreme.

The Egyptian Mamluks held authority in the northern Red Sea area, and from 1425 made their presence felt in the Hijaz, where they shared power with the Sharifs of Mecca. The tribal chiefs of the citadels along the coasts of the Yemen and Hadramaut were under the authority of the Rasulid Sultans, with Aden falling to the Tahirid Sultans by the end of the fifteenth century and ash-Shihr and the east to the Kathīrī Sultans. Instead of Christians and an imaginary Christian emperor in India whose aid could be mobilized in 'extirpating the Sarracenes,' all authors of the early sixteenth century emphasize the overwhelming importance of the Islamic pilgrimage in the traffic of the Red Sea. 'People use it more often than all the seas of the world because of the "Ancient House" and the pilgrimage of the Prophet and because of the means of subsistence and the going and coming of food.'¹⁷ In effect, most of the revenue of the

¹⁴ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 12.

¹⁵ Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 60.

¹⁶ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 8.

¹⁷ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 264; see also *Duarte Barbosa*, I, p. 47, and Brooks Greenlee, *Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral*, p. 69.

Mamluk Sultans of Cairo came 'from the pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre and the duties on spice passing through Cairo.'¹⁸ In Mecca, the India trade converged with the pilgrimage, both overland and by sea:

'... at the time of the Jubilee, which is held every year in Mecca on the first of February, when many people come [the merchandise] is sent to Mecca with them. And from there it comes to Jidda[h] and from Jidda[h] it comes to the warehouses they have in Aden and from Aden it is distributed to Cambay, Goa, Malabar, Bengal, Pegu and Siam.'¹⁹

Geographical knowledge, to be sure, was still vague. What the Italian travelers of the fifteenth century denote as the 'Indian Sea' (*Mare Indico*) still does not differ very much from the conception of the 'Erythraean Sea' of Ptolemy and other Greek writers. The 'Erythraean Sea' literally means the 'Red Sea' but the Ancients used the name for a larger body of water than the Red Sea of later times (which they referred to as the 'Arabian Gulf'). In the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* of the first century it comprises our Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the western Indian Ocean. The name *Erythra Thalassa* or 'Red Sea' probably goes back to an original Persian name, *Airyo-zarayo* or 'Aryan Sea,' through a false etymology.²⁰ This then became *Mare Rubrum* in Latin, and *Mare Roso* or *Al Mar Roso* in sixteenth-century Italian authors such as Zorzi.²¹ Pires writes that this sea has three names—Red Sea, Arabian Sea and Strait of Mecca—and that the name Red Sea was given to it because of the red barriers which are found at the end near Suez, but that the proper name is Arabian Sea.²² The Arabs however also call it the *Bahr al-Ahmar* or 'Red Sea,' as well as the *Bahr Qulzum*, after the village of Qulzum near the northern extremity of the Gulf of Suez.²³ Like the Italians (and later the Portuguese) they would also consider it as an extension of the *Bahr al-Hind* or 'Indian Ocean.'

The monsoon winds of the Indian Ocean, in effect, could take ships up to Jiddah, the port of Mecca, about halfway the two thousand

¹⁸ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

²⁰ M. J. De Goeje, 'Der Name "Rothes Meer"', *Orient und Occident*, 3, 1 (Göttingen, 1864), pp. 430–3.

²¹ Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 184, 188.

²² Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 8.

²³ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 399. Sometimes the name *Bahr Qulzum al-Arab* is used to distinguish it from the *Bahr al-Qulzum al-Ajam*, the Caspian Sea.

kilometres of the length of the narrow strait, but not beyond. Already in the tenth century Abu Zayd's *Silsilat at-Tawārikh* states that the boats of Siraf never go beyond Jiddah, where Red Sea boats take over the trade.²⁴ Texts of the late fifteenth century which deal with navigation in the Red Sea describe only that part of the sea which is between Jiddah and the entrance at Bab al-Mandab, near Aden.²⁵ They are thus limiting themselves to the part that was frequented by sailors and ships that would sail on the wider Indian Ocean either for the pilgrimage or for trading purposes, or for both. 'All the merchandise of India is unloaded at Jidda[h],' writes Pires.²⁶ Jiddah was 'a seaport whither every year ships from India were accustomed to go with spices and drugs . . . and then went back to Calicut,' according to Barbosa.²⁷ The Indian Ocean *mu'allim* or 'navigator' kept to the central part of the Red Sea, while the routes along the coasts remained the domain of the *rubbān*, who were in charge of all types of local boats, including fishing boats and coasters, the large flat-bottomed craft tied together with ropes which were called jilbas, and other small vessels called jaboos or sambuks.²⁸ In Jiddah, where the customs were shared (and forever disputed) among the Sharifs of Mecca and the governor of the Mamluk rulers of Cairo, the Indian spices and other products were transhipped onto such smaller vessels, specialist Red Sea ships, which would bring them to Suez, where they were unloaded onto camel caravans and brought to Alexandria and the ports of the Levant.²⁹ Sailing would be progressively more difficult the further north one went. As Pires writes:

'Men do not navigate except by day; they can always anchor. The best sailing is from the entrance to the strait as far as Kamaran. It is worse from Kamaran to Jidda[h] and much worse from Jidda[h] to Tor [at-Tūr]. From Tor to Suez is a route for small boats [only] even by day, because it is all dirty and bad.'³⁰

²⁴ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 398.

²⁵ G. R. Tibbetts, 'Arab Navigation in the Red Sea', *The Geographical Journal*, CXXVII, 3 (September, 1961), p. 322; Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 398.

²⁶ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 11.

²⁷ Duarte Barbosa, I, pp. 46–47.

²⁸ Tibbetts, 'Arab Navigation in the Red Sea', p. 323; Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 325, 398–9, 408; A. Moore, 'The craft of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden', *Mariners Mirror*, VI (London, 1920), pp. 73–136; Major, *India*, IV, p. 3.

²⁹ Cf. Bouchon and Lombard, 'The Indian Ocean in the Fifteenth Century,' p. 55.

³⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 9.

The northern half of the Red Sea has hundreds of kilometres of waterless desert on both sides, almost without any good harbours, while northerly winds blow down this part of the sea throughout the year.³¹ In these northern regions preference was more often given to caravan routes.

The Red Sea as a whole, however, was regarded as the most dangerous of all the seas of the world.³² Its fickle winds and storms were its greatest hazard.³³ Its currents were irregular, and there were immense coral reefs on both shores (some uncovered), shoals under water, and turbid areas everywhere.³⁴ The Red Sea climate was pestilential and brutally hot, whereas the desert on both sides was almost uninhabited and 'bare without fruit anywhere,' frequented by sandstorms.³⁵ The Bedouin controlled many of the bays of coral reef and the islands, as well as the camel routes from Suez to at-Tūr, from 'Aydhāb or Quseir to the Nile and Cairo, and from Jiddah to at-Tūr, and were a constant source of disruption.³⁶ Muslim rulers had first seized the islands of the Dahlak archipelago, off the coast of modern Massawa, in the seventh century, in an attempt to protect Arab shipping from Aksumite pirates, who had conducted raids as far as Jiddah.³⁷ The Umayyads established a penal colony on these bare and pancake flat islands, and the largest island of the group, Dahlak al-Kabir, was the seat of an Islamic sultanate from the ninth to the thirteenth century, exploiting fisheries of pearls which are still mentioned in the fifteenth century, under political conditions that are obscure.³⁸ Unlike the Suakin archipelago, which they knew much better, navigational works merely mention the outer islands of the Dahlak archipelago, considering the rest off limits.³⁹ Similarly, the coast inside the Farasān bank and islands does not seem to have been well-known to the navigators. The Farasān archipelago comprises the largest islands on the eastern side of the Red Sea, until

³¹ Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 5.

³² Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 264.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

³⁴ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 247–53, 263, 330.

³⁵ Cf. Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 9.

³⁶ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 12, 14, 17–18.

³⁷ L. Werner, 'Forging Plowshares in Eritrea', *Aramco World* (Nov.-Dec., 1996), p. 25.

³⁸ In Major, *India*, IV, p. 4. Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. lxxxv; Werner, 'Forging Plowshares', p. 25.

³⁹ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 416.

recently with only fishermen as their permanent human inhabitants.⁴⁰ Kamarān, to the south of these, was the fertile island, 'inhabited by Moors, where ships take in some provisions when they pass thereby . . . In this island there is plenty of well-water of which the ships make use.'⁴¹

If navigation was often unsafe, and routes along the shores unreliable, the fragility of town life in the Red Sea is well attested from ancient times. In ancient times the Egyptian shore of the Red Sea, to the south of Suez, was sprinkled with ports that were buried under the sand of the encroaching desert.⁴² Recent excavations at Berenike, about a thousand kilometres south of Suez, have revealed trading connections which extended as far as Java. They show that pepper was traded here on a huge scale, while Indian teakwood has been found in the ruins as well, and written materials in eleven languages. Established in the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, in the early third century BC, Berenike became dominant in the first century AD, but the harbour was silted over in the mid-sixth century, before it vanished under the desert.⁴³ Archaeologists are also investigating the probable sites of two other ancient ports in the area, Myos Hormos (near Quseir) and Nechesia, which suffered a similar fate. Adulis, the Eritrean port of Aksumite Ethiopia, was buried under river sedimentation by the eighth century AD.⁴⁴ 'Aydhāb was a harbour of which ruins still exist, on the westcoast at a height halfway between Mecca and Madina and linked to the Nile valley by caravan roads. Already a port used by merchants and pilgrims going to Mecca in the ninth century, it grew in importance from the eleventh century onwards, and may have reached its maximum extent in the fourteenth century, around the time when Ibn Battuta visited it in 1325 AD. 'Aydhāb, however, was never a flourishing city of any allure. As a place where everything had to be imported, even drinking water, it inspired but disgust.⁴⁵ Tensions between the Bejas of the local desert and the Mamluk governor were rife. It was destroyed

⁴⁰ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 403, 408, 410; Kh. Habibi, 'Elusive Encounters: Gazelles of the Farasan Islands', *Aramco World* (Nov.-Dec. 1994), pp. 10-15.

⁴¹ *Duarte Barbosa*, I, p. 52.

⁴² J. N. Wilford, 'Under Centuries of Sand, a Trading Hub', *The New York Times* (July 9, 2002), pp. D1, D3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ See Chapter I, pp. 21-22.

⁴⁵ Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Ibn Batoutah*, I, pp. 109-11; R. E. Dunn, *The*

during the reign of the Mamluk Sultan Barsbay (1422–38), allegedly in retaliation for the pillage of a pilgrim caravan by the locally powerful Bejas.⁴⁶ After its destruction, ‘Aydhāb’s place was taken by the offshore islands of Suakin.

Some of the most famous cities and towns of the Red Sea turn out to have been remarkably small and, insignificant in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, if contemporary evidence is to be relied on. At the very end of the strait, Suez, according to Barbosa, was the place where the Muslims brought all the spices, drugs and other wares from India, to be carried on towards Alexandria.⁴⁷ But, in Pires estimate, it was not a port, nor an inhabited place, but ‘an exposed and solitary place, with bare ground and no grass.’⁴⁸ At-Tūr, a frequently mentioned transit point in the Sinai peninsula, had not more than twenty houses.⁴⁹ Jiddah, the port of Mecca, was ‘a great trading city’, but its river-harbour was ‘small and shallow’ and the town itself was without walls, and had no more than five thousand inhabitants, and no natural products or fruits except dates, while much meat, fish, wheat, rice, barley and millet had to be imported from Zeila, Berbera and Suakin.⁵⁰ Mecca had ‘about a thousand people, many of them merchants.’⁵¹ Madina, some way into the desert, had ‘about a hundred inhabitants.’⁵² Along the coast to the south of Jiddah, there were ‘many Moorish villages’ such as Jīzān, al-Luhayyah, and al-Khūr, from where horses were taken to India for sale.⁵³ Al-Mukhā, according to local tradition, was founded by Shaykh Ali b. Umar al-Shādhilī (d. 1418), who allegedly offered a cup of coffee to an Indian captain as medicine.⁵⁴ This town, in actual fact, is the ‘Muza’ of Roman times, and is therefore much older, but even by the seventeenth century it appears to have been no more than a malaria-infested conglomerate of wooden shanties

Adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century (London and Sydney, 1986), p. 53.

⁴⁶ G. W. Murray, ‘Aidhab’, *The Geographical Journal*, 68 (1926), pp. 235–40; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, I, s.v. ‘Aydhāb; Dunn, *Ibn Battuta*, pp. 42–43, 51–53.

⁴⁷ Duarte Barbosa, I, p. 43.

⁴⁸ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 11, 18.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 18.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Duarte Barbosa, I, pp. 50–51.

⁵⁴ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Volume VII (Leiden, 1993), pp. 513–16, s.v. Al-Mukhā.

and 'an unbelievable number of cauwa (coffee) inns, which are generally of straw and reed' situated on an endless, flat desolate plain.⁵⁵ Before the early sixteenth century it was definitely not of great importance.⁵⁶ By contrast, Aden was already described as the key to the control of the Red Sea trade and 'the only populous town in this Arabia'.⁵⁷ Next to Hormuz and Malacca, the Portuguese regarded Aden as one of the three most important cities in India. These had in common that they were chokepoints at the entrance of narrow sea passages. Aden was the only one which the Portuguese failed to take, and it remained under the control of a Muslim king who lived inland.⁵⁸ Barbosa writes that 'this place has a greater and richer trade than any other in the world, and also this trade is in the most valuable commodities . . .'.⁵⁹ It traded with the people of Cairo 'as well as with those of all India'.⁶⁰ Hieronimo So Santo Stefano sailed from Aden to Calicut, without seeing land, in thirty-five days, after spending several months in the city.⁶¹ Aden had a good harbour, and, at the foot of a mountain, was very strongly fortified, with walls, towers, loopholes, and ordnance, and garrisoned with large numbers of soldiers, but was nonetheless 'a little town' which had to get its drinking water from outside.⁶²

Other ports existed in the Gulf of Aden which were important in the Ethiopian trade inland. Together with the offshore island of Massawa, San Stefano's 'Mazua,' which in the fifteenth century gave access to the country of Prester John but was under a Muslim lord,⁶³ and still in the Red Sea, by the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries Zeila and Berbera, followed by Tajura, were the most important ports for inland Ethiopian trade in the products of India.⁶⁴ Very little of this trade went to Cairo.⁶⁵ Beilul and Assab are described

⁵⁵ According to a Dutch merchant, quoted in Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, p. 33.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 15.

⁵⁸ Duarte Barbosa, I, p. 55.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁶⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 16.

⁶¹ Major, *India*, IV, p. 4.

⁶² Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 15, 17. For Aden, see also A. Löfgren (ed.), *Arabische Texte zur Kenntnis der Stadt Aden im Mittelalter* (Uppsala, 1936).

⁶³ Major, *India*, IV, p. 4; R. B. Pankhurst, 'Some Notes on the Historical and Economic Geography of the Mesawa-Area', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 13, 1 (1975), p. 101.

⁶⁴ Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 9, 66, 73, 95, 172-5, 185, 189.

as ports (the former as merely a roadstead) from where the plateau could be reached, but only by passing through the southern end of the great Danakil depression, a savage country where passage was very difficult as well as dangerous. About the conditions in and size of any of these ports in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries we know almost nothing, except that they were under Muslim rule.

An important landmark on the routes from Aden and the Red Sea to Africa and India was the island of Socotra (also Sokotrā), with its main port as-Sūq, four kilometres east of Hadhibu, the present port.⁶⁵ At a distance of 240 kilometres from Cape Guardafui, with a length of 120 kilometres and a width of 32 kilometres, Socotra was 'cast away in the Indian Ocean, like a fragment rejected in the construction of Africa.'⁶⁶ A noted haunt of pirates from Cutch, Kathiawar and Gujarat as early as the tenth century, it was home to one of the most important black markets of the Indian Ocean.⁶⁸ But the island also had its exports. A third of its flora was unique to the island, and it had a rich vegetable world. Its main productions were ambergris, cauries, frankincense, myrrh, valuable gums, dates, and top-quality aloes.⁶⁹ It also had a significant pastoral economy of sheep (producing woollen cloths mainly for the African market), camels and cows, and it produced large quantities of dried and salted fish.⁷⁰ Already in ancient times it attracted merchants from all directions. The Periplus mentions Indians on the island, bringing rice, cotton and slave girls. Ethiopic graffiti and tombs which resemble those of the Bejas of the Red Sea show that Socotra has also been part of the Ethiopian empire, which is probably the time when it was Christianized.⁷¹ Ibn Majid writes that 'some ruffianly Christians dwell there and some say they are remnants of the Greeks, about

⁶⁵ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 8, 14.

⁶⁶ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 445.

⁶⁷ Th. and Mabel V. A. Bent, *Southern Arabia, Soudan and Socotra* (London, 1900), p. 343.

⁶⁸ See Chapter III, p. 114.

⁶⁹ Duarte Barbosa, I, p. 63; and see T. Mackintosh-Smith, 'The Last Place in Yemen', *Aramco World* (Sept.-Oct., 1999), pp. 8-21; *First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913-36, Volume VII* (Leiden, 1987), pp. 476-81, s.v. Sokotrā; V. V. Naumkin and A. V. Sedov, 'Socotra', *Topoi*, 3, 2 (1993), pp. 569-623; Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, pp. 22-23; W. Wrānik, *Sokotra: Mensch und Natur* (Wiesbaden, 1999).

⁷⁰ Yule, *Marco Polo*, II, p. 406; Martin and Martin, *Cargoes of the East*, pp. 51, 134; Bent, *Southern Arabia*, pp. 369-70.

⁷¹ Yule, *Marco Polo*, II, p. 354.

20,000 people.⁷² Nicolo Conti spent two months on Socotra in the early part of the fifteenth century and reports that it was 'for the most part inhabited by Nestorian Christians',⁷³ while the first Portuguese reports say that it was inhabited by 'Christian shepherds'.⁷⁴ Socotra's debased form of Christianity persisted until the seventeenth century.⁷⁵ The Islamization of the island was however proceeding. In the fifteenth century Socotra was ruled by the Shaykhs of al-Mahra, who built a fort on it and took tribute in kind, including woven cloaks.⁷⁶ Al-Mahra, with its capital at Qishn, between Hadramaut and Oman (Arab geographers include it in the Yemen) had a Sultan who had lived in Socotra since long. The connection with al-Mahra had ancient roots, as is also shown by linguistic evidence. Members of all its tribes migrated to Socotra, and some of these adopted Christianity in pre-Islamic times. By the fifteenth century, according to Ibn Majid, the people of Socotra were married by Christian priests, but the Mahra ruled over them and protected them against the Sultans of Hadramaut, and, he adds, the Mahra had in fact driven out the kings of Shihr.⁷⁷ Barbosa refers to the Mahra of Socotra as 'Fartaque Moors' (after Ras Fartak, the cape of al-Mahra) who, he says,

'built a fort, which they held in order to subdue the country people, and make Moors of them, insomuch that those who dwelt around the fort were already become Moors, and served the Moors of Fartaque as if they were their slaves, with their persons as well as their estates, and lived in complete subjection to them, in great tribulation; yet they still kept some of their rites as best they could, which have remained with them from ancient times . . .'⁷⁸

Pires confirms that many of 'the nomads, merchants and good warriors' of Fartak went to Socotra, Zeila and Berbera as garrison captains.⁷⁹

The rise of permanent settlements on the Swahili coast of Africa, similarly, occurred within the context of the growth of Indian Ocean

⁷² Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 196.

⁷³ Major, *India*, II, p. 20.

⁷⁴ Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 4-5, 23.

⁷⁵ Yule, *Marco Polo*, II, pp. 406-7.

⁷⁶ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 223.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 223-4.

⁷⁸ *Duarte Barbosa*, I, p. 61, and see pp. 58-59.

⁷⁹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 19.

trade, particularly of precious metals, and the adoption of Islam.⁸⁰ If there were some thirty-seven sizeable towns along the coastal strip between the Kilwa group of islands and Mogadishu in the fifteenth century, many or perhaps most of these had grown out of small, local farming and fishing villages in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁸¹ Some were established earlier. The first permanent trading settlements anywhere on the Swahili coast date from the ninth century and were found in the Lamu archipelago, at Pate, Shanga and Manda, as well as on the southern Tanzanian coast at Mafia and Kilwa.⁸² All underwent major expansion with the growth of coastal and overseas trade, first in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, followed by a burst of development in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁸³ The well-arranged streets of 'lofty stone and mortar houses' which graced the central portions of towns like Kilwa, Mombasa or Malindi, were mostly a fifteenth-century creation.⁸⁴ Even at the end of the fifteenth century, however, few of these Swahili towns were larger than 16 hectares (40 acres).⁸⁵

By far the most important factor in the rise of Swahili towns was the transshipment of gold from the African interior (the area which is now Zimbabwe) through Sofala to the central Islamic lands and Hind which appears to have increased dramatically in importance in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries and which seems to have stimulated a whole range of new developments. The Sofala gold trade was at first monopolized by Mogadishu, but by the beginning of the fourteenth century Kilwa was its main beneficiary.⁸⁶ Kilwa, located nearer to the gold fields at the southern end of the monsoon

⁸⁰ R. O. Collins, 'Eastern Africa', in: R. O. Collins (ed.), *Eastern African History* (New York, 1990), p. 3; Connah, *African Civilizations*, p. 178; see also *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 25-33.

⁸¹ G. Mathew, 'The East African Coast until the Coming of the Portuguese', in: R. Oliver and G. Mathew (eds), *History of East Africa* (Oxford, 1976), p. 113; Nurse and Spear, *Swahili*, p. 21.

⁸² Nurse and Spear, *Swahili*, p. 3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸⁴ Duarte Barbosa, I, pp. 17, 20, 22; Mathew, 'East African Coast', p. 121.

⁸⁵ Nurse and Spear, *Swahili*, p. 21.

⁸⁶ N. Chittick, *Kilwa: An Islamic Trading City on the East African Coast, Volume I, History and Archaeology* (Nairobi, 1974); Mathew, 'East African Coast', pp. 112-3; J. De Barros, 'The Founding of Kilwa', in: R. O. Collins (ed.), *Eastern African History* (New York, 1990), pp. 56-61; N. Chittick, 'Kilwa', in: M. Posnansky (ed.), *Prelude to East African History* (London, 1966), pp. 125-36; Nurse and Spear, *Swahili*, pp. 3-5, 17, 84-85, 89.

routes, became the commercial focus of about 2400 kilometres of coast between Mombasa in the north and Sofala in the south, while other city states—Mogadishu, Mombasa, Pemba, and others to the north of Kilwa—benefited from the general expansion of trade as well.⁸⁷ ‘Before the King our Lord sent out his expedition to discover India the Moors of Cofala, Cuama, Angoya and Mocambique were all subject to the King of Quiloa,’ writes Barbosa.⁸⁸ Kilwa was a coastal and insular power. Apart from stimulating trade, Kilwa, like the other Islamic settlements on the Swahili coast, had little political impact on the hinterland, the tribesmen visiting the Islamic settlements of the coast, taking away with them beads and cloth, rather than the other way around.⁸⁹ Moreover, inland trade was always by barter. Only the coast was monetized. Sofala gold lubricated the expanding Indian Ocean commerce, but the inland kingdom of Benametapa found no use for it.

In addition to gold, Swahili merchants were tapping the other natural resources of the African interior and the coast itself, trading in an astonishing array of products over very long distances. These included dried fish, tortoise shell, mangrove poles, ambergris, rock crystal, high grade iron ore, copper, rhinoceros horn, ivory, frankincense, myrrh, ebony and other timbers, wax, sandalwood, and slaves.⁹⁰ Slaves, presumably, were bartered on the coast like any other merchandise, but Arab writers also refer to coastal rulers engaged in inland *jihād* raiding, which aimed to procure slaves rather than establish any permanent control deeply inland.⁹¹ The most important imports appear to have been cotton cloths and beads from Cambaya, Gujarat. The Swahili merchants

‘came from Quiloa, Mobaca and Melynde, bringing many cotton cloths . . . silk . . . small beads . . . which things come to the said kingdoms from the great kingdom of Cambaya in other great ships . . . [and they were] paid for in gold . . . which gold they gave by weight. . . . The Moors of Cofala kept these wares and sold them afterwards to the Heathen of the Kingdom of Benametapa, who came thither with gold which they gave in exchange for the said cloths without weighing it.’⁹²

⁸⁷ Collins, ‘Eastern Africa’, p. 3.

⁸⁸ *Duarte Barbosa*, I, p. 18.

⁸⁹ Chittick, ‘Kilwa’, pp. 135–6.

⁹⁰ Connah, *African Civilizations*, p. 179.

⁹¹ J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in East Africa* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 7–9.

⁹² *Duarte Barbosa*, I, pp. 7–8, and see pp. 22–23, 31.

Indian spices were also traded on the African eastcoast, as were Arabian horses, and Ming porcelain has been found at every coastal site (Mogadishu, Barawa and Juba were Imperial tributaries after the expeditions to East Africa of 1417–19 and 1421–2), while Martaban (Mon) ware was not uncommon, and coinages that have been found in Zanzibar and on the Mafia islands include those of the late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Ilkhanid rulers of Tabriz.⁹³

Over the centuries, migration to the Swahili coast occurred mostly in connection with such overseas trade. Before 1498 there was a complex network of coastal and island commercial centres, trade routes, and entrepôts linked by interrelated families of Muslims with origins in the Hadramaut, Yemen, Oman, the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, Cutch, Gujarat, Sind, Malabar, and all other parts of the Indian Ocean.⁹⁴ Pires, in the early sixteenth century, still encountered ‘men of Kilwa, Malindi, Ormuz’ in Malacca.⁹⁵ Among the foreign Muslims that came to the East African coast, many were sojourners who came for one season only. But small numbers also settled on the coast, and remained confined to their settlements. Permanent settlers from the Hadramaut, escaping the unpredictable rainfall in arid inland wadis, were perhaps most common, including migratory clans of holy families of Sayyids, Sharifs and Mashaykh, who married into local ruling elites or founded new Muslim dominions.⁹⁶ The Hadramaut almost always married local women with or without Hadramaut blood, since Hadramaut women rarely emigrated.⁹⁷ But the general mobility on the coast inevitably led to ethnic mongrelization everywhere, and the people who are now called the *Sawāhila* or ‘coastalists’ are really a mixture of coastal African, Arab, Persian, Indian and other elements.⁹⁸ The language of this society that mediated between the commercial world of the sea and the production areas of the hinterland was known as *Swahili* too,

⁹³ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 14; Duarte Barbosa, I, p. 31; Mathew, ‘East African Coast’, p. 111.

⁹⁴ B. G. Martin, ‘Arab migrations to East Africa in medieval times’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 7 (1974), pp. 367–9.

⁹⁵ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, p. 268.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 371, 377, 379; N. Chittick, ‘The “Shirazi” Colonization of East Africa’, in: J. D. Fage and R. A. Oliver (eds), *Papers in African Prehistory* (London, 1970), pp. 257–76.

⁹⁷ H. Ingrams, *Arabia and the Isles* (New York, 1966), pp. 42, 44.

⁹⁸ Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in East Africa*, pp. 9, 11.

and it became the lingua franca of the coast. Structurally and lexically it was a Bantu language, but it developed an Arabic vocabulary in fields like Shafi'i jurisprudence (predominant on the coast), trade, religion, maritime affairs, and non-indigenous flora.⁹⁹ There was also a small, non-Muslim but significant, migratory group of Gujarati Indians—mostly financiers, moneylenders or goldsmiths—in some Swahili ports, with extensions as far north as the Red Sea.¹⁰⁰ De Barros noted these in 1498 in Malindi, observing that they did not kill insects and were very withdrawn and sparing in conversation. This probably means that they were Jains, rather than Hindus. From what we know of such Gujarati 'banians' elsewhere, the majority of them were sojourners rather than settlers, and they probably did not marry locally at any time.¹⁰¹ In sum, Swahili towns were 'polyglot, multiethnic frontiers,' consisting of Arab merchants and ship owners, Indian financiers, Swahili middlemen, traders, shipbuilders, sailors, and fishermen, and so on, as well as slave labourers and neighbouring farmers, herders, and hunters, caught up in 'the kaleidoscopic political mayhem of Swahili life' which allowed different cities to become dominant at different times, frequently by making war on each other, but precluded the emergence of a unified empire at any time.¹⁰²

It was the Islamic religion that became the great common denominator and unifying factor, on the Swahili coast as much as anywhere in the Indian Ocean.¹⁰³ Conversion to Islam and the adoption of an Islamic identity coincided with the period of prosperity founded on the expansion of trade. It brought the Swahili into the common market of the Indian Ocean and into the cosmopolis of the faith which was uniquely focused on Mecca. Local conversion in the larger communities appears to have begun from the twelfth century onwards.¹⁰⁴ Every site, around that time, acquired at least one stone-built mosque, while the main congregational mosque usually occupied

⁹⁹ Spear, 'Early Swahili Reconsidered', p. 259.

¹⁰⁰ Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders*, p. 42.

¹⁰¹ See below, pp. 200–1.

¹⁰² Spear, 'Early Swahili Reconsidered', p. 259; Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders*, p. 43.

¹⁰³ Cf. Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders*, p. 54; P. Risso, 'Muslim identity in the maritime Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean Region', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 21 (1989), pp. 381–92.

¹⁰⁴ Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders*, p. 56.

a central position within each settlement.¹⁰⁵ According to Barbosa, 'all the sea-coast is well-peopled with villages and abodes of Moors',¹⁰⁶ and he singles out Sofala, Angoya, Mombasa, Malindi, Kilwa, Mocambique, and Mogadishu as especially important 'Moorish' towns.¹⁰⁷ Kilwa may have dominated large parts of the coast in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (until it was overtaken by Mombasa) but it was paradigmatically the same as the others. Kilwa was built on a coral island separated from the mainland by a very deep channel about one-and-a-half kilometre wide. It had a sheltered port and one of the finest natural harbours of the coast, but was also close to an accessible beach and rich agricultural hinterland with rice, fruits and cattle. The originally wooden mosques at Kilwa were enlarged and reconstructed in stone in the eleventh century. The town acquired a palace-fortress open to the sea, with, at its height, perhaps four thousand Arabic and Swahili speaking inhabitants, most of which were Muslims, both light-skinned and black. The town also had its share of non-Muslim Indian residents. The rest of the total population of twelve thousand consisted mainly of slaves and was employed in plantations. In the fourteenth century it repeatedly undertook *jihād* expeditions against the people of the mainland, while two of its rulers are on record to have gone to Mecca in that century.

The southernmost extension of Swahili culture, and the dead end of it, was Madagascar.¹⁰⁸ The first Arabs who started to arrive here in the seventh to ninth centuries, found an island that had already

¹⁰⁵ Connah, *African Civilizations*, p. 177.

¹⁰⁶ Duarte Barbosa, I, p. 18.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–33.

¹⁰⁸ For Madagascar, see: Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 218–9, 432–5; Yule, *Marco Polo*, II, pp. 411–21; M. G. Ferrand, *Les Musulmans à Madagascar et aux îles Comores*, 3 Volumes (Paris, 1893); R. J. Harrison Church, *Africa and the Islands* (London, 1971); A. M. Jones, *Africa and Indonesia: the evidence of the xylophone and other musical and cultural factors* (Leiden, 1964); H. Deschamps, *Histoire de Madagascar* (Paris, 1960); H. Grosset-Grange, 'La côte Africaine dans les routiers nautiques arabes au moment des grandes decouvertes', *Azania*, 13 (1978); R. A. Oliver and G. A. Mathew, *A History of East Africa*, I (Oxford, 1963); P. Verin, 'The African Element in Madagascar', *Azania*, 11 (1976); H. Deschamps, *Les pirates à Madagascar* (Paris, 1949); A. Grandidier et al., *Collection des Ouvrages anciens concernant Madagascar* (Paris, 1905); Martin, 'Arab Migrations to East Africa', p. 387; G. Ferrand, 'Madagascar et les îles Uaq-Uaq', *Journal Asiatique*, 2ième série, tome III (1904), pp. 489–509; G. Ferrand, 'Les îles Râmny, Lâmery, Wâkwâk, Komor des Géographes Arabes, et Madagascar', *Journal Asiatique*, Dixième Serie, Tome X (1907), pp. 433–566; G. Ferrand, 'Le peuplement de Madagascar', *Revue de Madagascar* (Febr. 1907), pp. 81–91; P. Verin, *The History of Civilisation in North Madagascar* (Rotterdam and Boston, 1986); *Al-Hind*, I, p. 27.

been colonized by Indonesian seafarers, the so-called *Waqwaq* (from *waga*, an outrigger canoe) who had migrated from the 'Zabaj islands,' most likely Sumatra, in the second and fourth centuries, after first landing on the African mainland, and again in the tenth century, and possibly as late as the twelfth century AD. The *Waqwaq* appear to have been the same people who had been instrumental in disseminating Asian crops like rice, yam, and banana across the 'banana corridor' in East Africa, starting at the mouth of the Zambezi. The Arab geographers knew them for their piratical habits. The *Waqwaq* raided Sofala and other towns and villages of the Zanj, up and down the eastcoast of the African mainland, as well as on the Comoro islands. The island of Pemba, for instance, was besieged by the *Waqwaq* in 945 AD, who obtained 'ivory, tortoiseshell, pantherskins, and ambergris' and captured and enslaved 'Zanj people.' It seems extremely likely that they maintained commercial relations with Indonesia in these centuries: Zanj slaves are mentioned in Java in 800 AD. Ultimately, however, the *Waqwaq* moved further into the mountainous interior of Madagascar, onto the high plateaux of Malagache. Here we still find vestiges of Hinduism, while the Malagasy language contains Sanskrit words and appears to be an evolved form of Malay, close to the Batak languages.

Scholars have identified the Arab connections of certain semi-Islamized ethnic groups on the east and northwest coasts of Madagascar. These were the *mutawahhishun*, Arabs who had 'gone wild,' a category also used in the Indonesian context.¹⁰⁹ Many Muslim settlements are found on islands near the coasts and in peninsular settings, and, where neither of these existed, on high dunes, usually at the mouths of rivers. It is clear that most Muslims who settled in Madagascar in medieval times, down the entire eastcoast and down the northwest coast to at least Cap St André, came from the neighbouring African coast.¹¹⁰ The links between Madagascar and the Islamic heartlands were thin. The 'Great Island' had no gold, no elephants, hence no ivory, no spices, and little potential for the slave trade. It was not well known to the Arab navigators. By the time of Ibn Majid, Arab sailors knew the coasts and ports as far south

¹⁰⁹ Martin, 'Arab Migrations to East Africa', p. 387; L. W. C. Van Den Berg, *Le Hadramout et les Colonies Arabes dans l'Archipel Indien* (Batavia, 1886), p. 224; R. Kent, *Early Kingdoms in Madagascar, 1500-1700* (New York, 1970), Chapter 2.

¹¹⁰ Verin, *History of Civilization in Madagascar*, p. 53.

as 18 d S., although not as well as the coast of the African mainland. Around Madagascar various other island groups are mentioned: Tīro-zahā, which could be the islands of Santa Clara; al-Wāghil, which may be the Mascarenes; and the Zarīn, which may be the Seychelles. The latter two groups were still entirely uninhabited by humans. By contrast, the mountainous and volcanic Comoros—which derive their name from al-Qumr, ‘the Moon,’ a name originally applied by the Arabs to Madagascar—were an important stop on the old maritime routes as well as a source of unprocessed agricultural products.¹¹¹ They too were an extension of the Swahili coast, with a significant Malay-Indonesian input. The first Arabs to arrive here were probably from the Hadramaut, who were joined by Bantu-speaking and Swahili-speaking Africans. From the tenth century Shirazi Arabs from Persia and the western Indian Ocean became more influential here, and the Islamic character of these islands was again reinforced after a second wave of Shirazis arrived in the mid-fifteenth century. From then on the ‘Islands of the Moon’ were mainly ruled by Shirazi chiefs (*fanis*, who could be women). A final group of islands, to the northwest of these, whose importance was rising in the later fifteenth century, were Mafia, Pemba and Zanzibar (Zanjī-barr, ‘land of the blacks’).¹¹² These too had early links with South-Arabian kingdoms, and by the fifteenth century were not only inhabited by Muslims but had Muslim kings.¹¹³

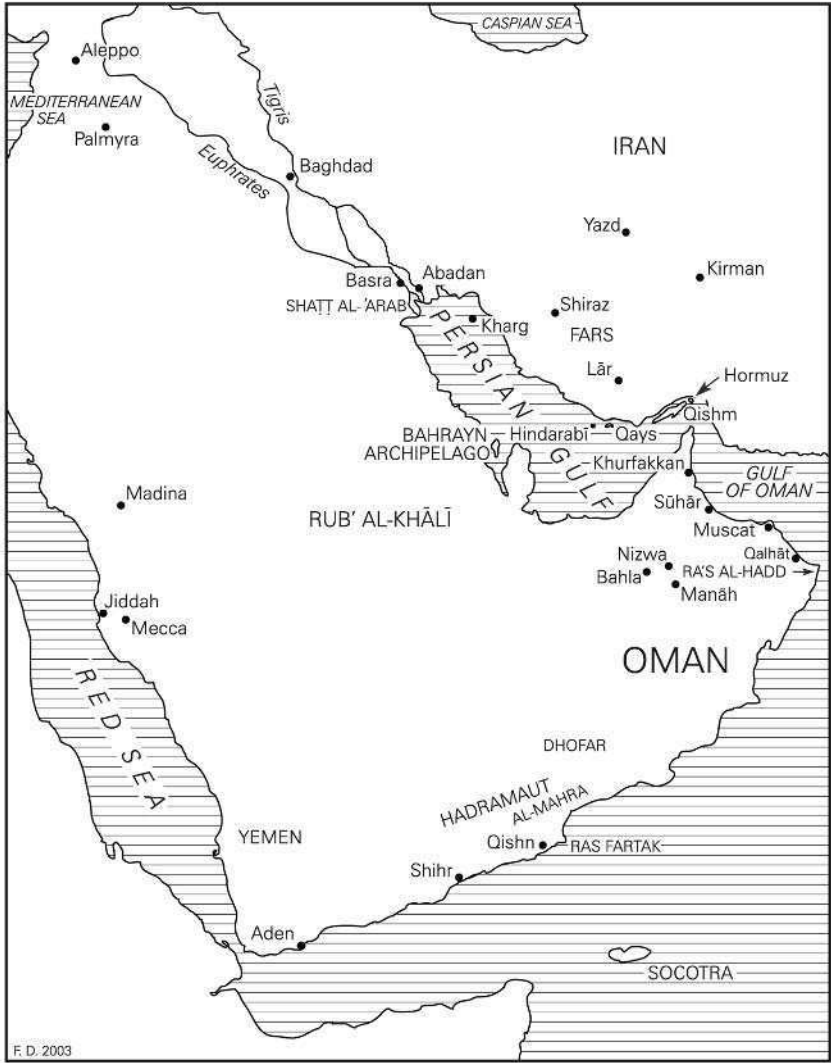
Sailing beyond the Hadramaut port of ash-Shihr and the Mahra kingdom between ash-Shihr and Dhofar, the most easterly point of the Arabian peninsula is reached at the Ra’s al-Hadd. Here, at the entrance of the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf, another maritime and coastal configuration began, which rivaled that of Aden in importance, ‘the kingdom and seignory of Ormuz [Hormuz].’¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Ingrams, *Arabia and the Isles*, pp. 63–64; E. Gould, ‘The Islands of the Moon,’ *Aramco World* (July–August 1996), pp. 29–39; Ferrand, *Les Musulmans à Madagascar et aux îles Comores*; H. T. Wright et al., ‘Early Seafarers in the Comoro Islands: the Dembeni Phase of the IX–X Centuries,’ *Azania*, 19 (1984).

¹¹² Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 221; Duarte Barbosa, *I*, pp. 26–28; R. F. Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island and Coast* (London, 1872); F. B. Pearce, *Zanzibar, the Island Metropolis of East Africa* (London, 1956); Yule, *Marco Polo, II*, pp. 422–3; Ingrams, *Arabia and the Isles*, pp. 4–5, 29.

¹¹³ Duarte Barbosa, *I*, pp. 26–27.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.



Map 4. Arabia and Persian Gulf

To designate the extent of the realm of Hormuz, the texts do not use the term 'Persian Gulf,' although that existed (Bahr Fars, Bahr Fāris, Daryā-i-Fārs, Khālīj Fāris).¹¹⁵ They call it 'land of coasts' (sawāhil) or 'the coasts and the islands' (sawāhil-o-jazāyir) or 'the maritime land' (nāhiyat-i daryā, daryā-bār) in the 'hot countries' (garmsīr, garmsīrāt), or, more rarely, 'the passage' (ma'bar).¹¹⁶ Effectively, this 'land of coasts' came to comprise everything that was connected by water between Ra's al-Hadd and Basra and Abadan at the end of the Gulf, which, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, was under the dominion of the Ilkhanids and other Turko-Mongol khans. Hormuz itself was founded around 1300 AD on the small desert island of Jarūn, in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow sea-passage which joins the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf. Having made itself master of the islands of the Persian Gulf, up to Bahrayn and Kharg, as well as the coasts on the mainland of Iran and the ports of Oman, it controlled one of the great avenues of the India trade. In this 'passage' the conditions for navigation were more favourable than in the Red Sea, although here too there was a lack of fresh water on both coasts, and the southern or Arabian coast was obstructed by reefs and shoals which served as hideouts for pirates—which is why the main ports were historically on Iranian territory.¹¹⁷ And here too, the monsoon winds, without bringing rain, had a decisive influence on navigation since they were dependable and could be used by the dhows sailing southwards in the summer.¹¹⁸ Hormuz and its landbases were known as 'ports of India'.¹¹⁹ They traded with or via Gujarat and the Deccan rather than Malabar (which was more closely linked to the Red Sea).¹²⁰ And not much of the trade of Hormuz was destined for the Levant market. 'They bring back (to Hormuz) pepper, cloves, cinnamon, ginger and all sorts of other spices and drugs, which are greatly in demand in the land of Persia and Arabia,' writes Pires.¹²¹ Other Indian merchandise

¹¹⁵ Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz,' p. 79.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Wilson, *Persian Gulf*, p. 5; Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, pp. 20–21; Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 5; Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, p. 129.

¹¹⁸ D. E. Long, *The Persian Gulf: An Introduction to Its Peoples, Politics, and Economics* (Boulder, 1978), p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz,' p. 80.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

¹²¹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 21.

to be found in Hormuz included, above all, cotton textiles from Cambay and from Chaul and Dabhol, rice, metals, minerals, and slaves.¹²² From Hormuz came horses, pearls, silk, sugar, iron, 'Indian salt,' ghumams of all kinds (including Africans), and large quantities of Lārī coinage.¹²³

Like the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf was an area of bleak coasts, pitiless sunshine, scanty population and a low standard of living, with villages that were often no more than clusters of mud huts.¹²⁴ Whatever urban life existed in the Gulf was highly instable. People were quick to abandon a city in times of insecurity, and major migrations, circumstantial or seasonal, were characteristic of the urban life of the entire region.¹²⁵ Towns could vanish practically overnight.¹²⁶ A big summer migration towards the mainland seasonally depopulated Hormuz.¹²⁷ Earthquakes did much damage to the buildings on Jarun in 1482 and 1483, and, at other times, destroyed entire towns elsewhere in the region.¹²⁸ River sedimentation choked harbours. Particularly the instability of the Tigris-Euphrates river system and the Shatt al-ʿArab was notorious for disrupting settlement in the Basra region.¹²⁹ Beyond Basra, the Tigris was a maze of islands, swamps and gullies, requiring local pilotage.¹³⁰ Here the river was littered with shipwrecks and constantly changed its course, not uncommonly washing away parts of the town of Basra itself, which was built mainly of earth.¹³¹ Due to changes in the courses of the Euphrates and the Tigris the physical conditions in many parts of Iraq were

¹²² Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz,' pp. 167–8, 175.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 167–8, 175–7.

¹²⁴ Wilson, *Persian Gulf*; Long, *Persian Gulf*, p. 4. For the Persian Gulf generally see also: Potts, *Arabian Gulf*; S. B. Miles, *The countries and tribes of the Persian Gulf*, 2 Volumes (London, 1919); H. Heberlein, *Einsame Inseln: Eine Forscherfahrt im Persischen Golf* (Zürich, 1956); L. Lorimer, *Persian Gulf Gazetteer*, 6 Volumes (Calcutta, 1903/London, 1969); W. B. Fischer (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran, I, The Land of Iran* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 212–49.

¹²⁵ Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', pp. 151–2.

¹²⁶ Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, p. 25.

¹²⁷ Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', pp. 96, 152.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 89; for other examples see below, p. 194.

¹²⁹ Wilson, *Persian Gulf*, p. 67; G. Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate: Mesopotamia, Persia and Central Asia from the Moslem Conquest to the time of Timur* (Cambridge, 1930), pp. 43–44.

¹³⁰ Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, p. 17; Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, p. 129.

¹³¹ Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, p. 17.

very different from what they are now.¹³² As late as the sixteenth century the main channel of the Tigris, about 160 kilometres below Baghdad, turned off south from what is its present-day course and flowed down the channel now known as the Shatt al-Hai, past Wasit, below which it spread out and became lost in the Great Swamp which reached up to Basra, where the former course of the river became marked as the 'Blind Tigris'.¹³³ According to early Arab writers, ships from Basra reached the open sea at Abadan, which is now more than 36 kilometres up the estuary.¹³⁴ Abadan still flourished in the thirteenth century, but in the fourteenth century the town is reported by Ibn Battuta to have sunk to the size of a small village and to have been already five kilometres from the sea.¹³⁵ Mahrūbān, the first port reached by ships bound for India after leaving Basra and the Tigris estuary, by the fourteenth century was completely engulfed in the delta of the Hindiyan river (then known as the Shirin), so that even its site has disappeared, while the connecting town of Arrajan had fallen to ruins entirely.¹³⁶ The next port at the head of the Gulf was Siniz or Shiniz, the ruins of which lie near Bandar Dilam, about half a league from the open sea.¹³⁷ It was larger than Mahruban in the tenth century.¹³⁸

Hormuz itself was a frontier town without antecedents, of limited duration, the product of a single and fitful stage of urban evolution.¹³⁹ Its predecessor, Old Hormuz, the city on the mainland, was abandoned in the early fourteenth century, possibly as much on account of the silting-up of the Mināb river as on account of Mongol raids.¹⁴⁰ The New Hormuz that was founded on the island of Jarūn, about six kilometres off the mainland, retained its unchallenged position in the Persian Gulf until the Portuguese conquest of 1515 AD, and died with the Safawid conquest of 1622 and the concomitant creation of Bandar Abbas. For as long as Hormuz lasted, its crucial advantage was its port.¹⁴¹ But all accounts of Hormuz draw attention

¹³² Wilson, *Persian Gulf*, p. 67; and see Chapter I, pp. 10–11.

¹³³ Wilson, *Persian Gulf*, *ibid.*; Le Strange, *Lands*, pp. 43–44.

¹³⁴ Wilson, *Persian Gulf*, p. 68.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', p. 78.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86, note 27.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 20: 'The city is founded on account of its port.'

to the desolation of the site and the great wealth of the city. Drinking water and almost everything else had to be brought from the mainland and other islands.¹⁴² Fishing was very important, but other than that the island produced only 'Indian salt,' which was used as ballast by all ships coming to Hormuz, and sold in many places.¹⁴³ The city's only important fortified place was the royal palace.¹⁴⁴ Nonetheless, in its heyday at the turn of the fifteenth century, it had a population of about 40,000 and was the largest agglomeration in the entire Persian Gulf.¹⁴⁵ Fifteenth-century visitors report that 'Hormuz has no equal in the world,' that it was visited by merchants of the whole world, 'from Egypt to China,' and that 'the people of the country are all rich.'¹⁴⁶

While the customs of the India trade were its principal source of revenue, Hormuz was not a merchant republic but a monarchy with South-Arabian origins and political ties to the Iranian world.¹⁴⁷ There was intense competition between the Arab and Iranian portions of the population in the politics of the city-state throughout the fifteenth century.¹⁴⁸ Of the ten princes that occupied the throne of Hormuz between 1400 and 1506, five were deposed, four assassinated.¹⁴⁹ Its army consisted to a large degree of Turkish, Lāri, Tārūmi, and Habshi mercenaries and ghulams.¹⁵⁰ And in the course of the fifteenth century, the kings of Hormuz have successively been forced to recognize the Timurids, the Qara-qoyunlu and the Aq-qoyunlu, even when they succeeded in maintaining independence and proved capable of pushing back attempts at conquest.¹⁵¹ What ultimately held the kingdom of Hormuz together was not a military chain of command but the network of interests and constraints that governed the commercial society on the coasts of the Persian Gulf and which continued to thrive. Socially the city stood wide open. There was no religious or social segregation in Hormuz, and there were no ethnic

¹⁴² Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 20; Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', p. 153.

¹⁴³ Duarte Barbosa, I, p. 91.

¹⁴⁴ Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', p. 90.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150; *Al-Hind*, II, p. 20.

¹⁴⁶ Major, *India*, I, pp. 5-7; Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 224; Mills, *Ma Huan*, pp. 165-72.

¹⁴⁷ Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', pp. 140, 145, 148.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 79, 138-9.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 133, 138, 141.

quarters.¹⁵² The Sunni majority tolerated the presence among itself of a Shi'ite minority, although the latter held their cultic gatherings outside the actual town.¹⁵³ The same was true for the colonies of Indian 'kuffār,' Gujarati banians and 'gentiles of Sind,' whose sacred cows could roam freely through the city streets but who in all likelihood also maintained cultsites outside town.¹⁵⁴ And there were Jewish colonies in all Persian Gulf towns, including Hormuz.¹⁵⁵ Religiously tolerant, Hormuz was also considered 'the most debauched place in the world.'¹⁵⁶ 'They hold the creed of Mafamede in great honour. They indulge themselves greatly, so much so that they keep among them youths for purposes of abominable wickedness.'¹⁵⁷

Hormuz extended its maritime empire to all the islands of the Persian Gulf.¹⁵⁸ Most of these were small, like Tunb, Hindarabī ('Arabian Hind'), Satvār, or the pilot islands of Forūr, Lār, and, at the end of the Gulf, the frequently visited island of Khārg (which has Islamic, Zoroastrian and Christian archaeological remains).¹⁵⁹ Some were bigger. The large and fertile island of Qishm, with its numerous villages and walled gardens, supplied Hormuz with fresh fruits and vegetables.¹⁶⁰ Qays, much reduced and with its old city in ruins, was still an island with numerous inhabitants, crafts, cultivated lands, and pearlfisheries.¹⁶¹ And, above all, Uwāl, the largest island of the Bahrayn archipelago, together with al-Hasā (the Arabian coast), constituted an economic region of great importance, exporting dates, horses and pearls to India, and supplying drinking water to merchant ships.¹⁶²

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 161–2.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 95, 161.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 95, 151, 163.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 159–60.

¹⁵⁷ Duarte Barbosa, I, p. 91.

¹⁵⁸ Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', p. 97.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 97–98; Hotz, 'Roobacker's Scheepsjournaal', p. 383; Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, p. 20; R. Ghirshman, *Ile de Kharg* (Teheran, 1960).

¹⁶⁰ Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', p. 102; Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 221; Duarte Barbosa, I, p. 80; Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, p. 23.

¹⁶¹ Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', p. 97; *Al-Hind*, II, p. 19.

¹⁶² Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', pp. 99–100; Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 221, 447; Duarte Barbosa, I, pp. 81–82; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 19; J. Th. Bent, 'The Bahrain Islands in the Persian Gulf', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, XII (London, 1892).

Equally importantly, the supremacy of Hormuz depended on the control and development of the ports and littoral of Oman.¹⁶³ Hormuz maintained coastal guards along the entire Omani littoral, up to Ra's al-Hadd, and denied the Omani shaykhs free access to the sea.¹⁶⁴ In the fourteenth century, the Omani port-city of Qalhāt was almost a second capital of the kingdom of Hormuz, to be superseded in importance by Muscat in the fifteenth century, after it had been repeatedly devastated by earthquakes, like Sīrāf in earlier times.¹⁶⁵ Qalhāt remained a frequently visited city however, and there were other ports of significance, such as Sūhār, Khurfakkan and Gulfār.¹⁶⁶ But Muscat, with seven thousand inhabitants, had become the principal port of Hormuz on the Omani coast by the late fifteenth century.¹⁶⁷ In all cases, these coastal cities of Oman were more than just outposts of Hormuz on the route to India, the Red Sea and East Africa.¹⁶⁸ Their hinterlands had important economic functions that largely eluded Hormuz. Oman combined seatriade not only with fishing but also with irrigated agriculture and pastoral nomadism.¹⁶⁹ Among its most important exports were dried fish, cereals and horses. In Oman about forty different kinds of dates were grown, including the so-called Ferd, the one which bears best a long period of transport on board of a ship.¹⁷⁰ Oman's interior was dotted with walled towns, comprising some forty places which were among the most populated in all Arabia—cities like Manāh, Nizwa, Bahlā—and the rise of the Banū Jabr to great power in eastern Arabia in the second half of the fifteenth century showed that political formations in the interior of Oman could, at long last, become a threat to Hormuz's control of the coast.¹⁷¹

Hormuz further maintained its maritime hegemony by subjecting the Iranian coast to a system of control that was not less rigorous than that of the Omani coast, preventing the construction of local

¹⁶³ P. Risso, *Oman & Muscat: An Early Modern History* (New York, 1986), p. 4.

¹⁶⁴ Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', pp. 111–27, 140–1.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 112–5.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 116; Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, p. 26.

¹⁶⁷ Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', p. 115.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 117–9.

¹⁷⁰ 'Die Häfen und Handelsverhältnisse', p. 201.

¹⁷¹ Aubin, 'Royaume d'Ormuz', pp. 121–7.

fleets by an embargo on building materials.¹⁷² It kept open the caravan posts along the routes from Shiraz, Kirman and Yazd through the desolate plateaux of the Garmsīrāt to Mughistan and Fārs.¹⁷³ The city of Lār rose as a result of the development of the new route from Hormuz to Shiraz, while the princes of Lār unified the interior polities that lived off the India trade in the fifteenth century.¹⁷⁴ These princes extended their power in the districts immediately behind the littoral chain, on occasion intervening in the ports as well.¹⁷⁵ With the Lārī currency penetrating the Indian Ocean markets, there was considerable involvement of the merchants and mercenaries of Lār overseas, especially in the Deccan.

In contrast to the 'coasts and the islands' of Hormuz, the seaboard of Gujarat—which Portuguese authors refer to as 'the noble kingdom of Cambay'—was ruled by a Muslim king from inland capitals, i. c. Ahmadabad and Champaner. And to a much larger degree than Hormuz, the seaports of Gujarat also served as outlets for agricultural hinterlands, apart from being transmission points in the Indian Ocean trade.¹⁷⁶ Cambay, on the northern bank of the river Mahi, had become the main port of Gujarat long before the Muslim conquest of 1298, and was already then a very rich city, with trading links to Persia, Arabia and Sofala, as well as Malabar and the Coromandel. In spite of mudflats becoming an ever bigger threat to the port, making it inaccessible at low tide, it was to extend its trading activities even further in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, reaching out as far as Malacca.¹⁷⁷ Portuguese authors testified to the vitality of Jainism in the kingdom of Cambay and held to the view that the Jains were deprived of their kingdom by the Muslims because of their pacifism and 'kindheartedness'.¹⁷⁸ The fact is that the Muslims took over the state, and that they took over much of the trade as well, but by no means all of it. By the early sixteenth century, the many seaports of Gujarat, such as Surat, Rander, Diu, Mahim,

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

¹⁷⁵ J. Aubin, 'Références pour Lār Médiévale', *Journal Asiatique* (1955), p. 491.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 33, 35, 40–41.

¹⁷⁷ *Al-Hind*, II, p. 270; Arasaratnam and Ray, *Masulipatnam and Cambay*, pp. 119–20; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 35.

¹⁷⁸ *Al-Hind*, II, p. 355.

Daman, Patan, Gogha, Ghandhār, Bassein, Thana, and the 'great and fair city called Cambaya' itself had a mixed population of 'Moors and Heathen'.¹⁷⁹ Together they constituted an Indo-Islamic thalassocracy which spanned almost the entire Indian Ocean.

'Cambay stretches out two arms, with her right arm she reaches out towards Aden and with the other towards Malacca, as the most important places to sail to . . . And this trade is carried out by ships from Aden and ships from Cambay, many of one and many of the other. And it [Cambay] trades with all the other places I have mentioned, bartering one kind of merchandise for another . . . It has all the silks there are in these parts, all the different kinds of cotton material . . . it has carnelians, indigo . . . etc. . . a good deal of opium . . . etc. . . leather . . . wheat, barley, millet, sesame-oil, rice . . . all natural products of Cambay . . . The people of Ormuz bring horses to Cambay, and silver, gold, silk, alum, vitriol, copperas, and seed pearls. They bring back the products of the country and those brought there from Malacca, because they come to Cambay for all the Malacca merchandise. The people of Ormuz take back rice and food stuffs for the most part, and spice.'¹⁸⁰

The fortified island of Diu, off the southcoast of Kathiawar, with its good harbour and with trading connections that were almost as extensive as those of Cambay, served as a naval base for a fleet of at least seven hundred warships that were on active duty on the Sultan's behalf throughout the entire coast, as far south as the island of Mahim (the later Bombay), and beyond.¹⁸¹ Like Hormuz, the Sultan of Gujarat employed 'many warriors from outside with whose assistance they are constantly fighting'.¹⁸²

Carrying no arms, and divorced from political power, the Jains of Cambay were by the fifteenth century almost entirely confined to the trading and financial sector, inland as well as on the coasts, and to some extent overseas as well.¹⁸³ These 'Heathen' carried on all their trade with the Muslims, ate no flesh or fish, tried to save the lives of birds, ants and condemned prisoners, and were known as 'baniyas'.¹⁸⁴ 'Great idolaters and soft, weak people,' they inhabited

¹⁷⁹ *Al-Hind*, II, p. 271; *Duarte Barbosa*, I, pp. 108, 134–53; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 34.

¹⁸⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 42–45.

¹⁸¹ *Duarte Barbosa*, I, pp. 128–30; *TA*, pp. 214, 216, 246, 259–60, 278; *TF*, II, pp. 188, 200–1, 203.

¹⁸² Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 34, 45.

¹⁸³ *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 273, 355; *Duarte Barbosa*, I, p. 113.

¹⁸⁴ *Duarte Barbosa*, I, pp. 109–12.

almost a third part of the kingdom of Cambay.¹⁸⁵ Together with a certain number of brahmans and Pattars they 'had the cream of the trade.'¹⁸⁶ Muslim traders, however, had been taking over more and more of the long-distance maritime trade, some of them penetrating the inland networks as well, albeit to a lesser degree.¹⁸⁷ Among these Muslim merchants we have to distinguish several distinct groups. There were the great Arab and Persian ship owners and merchants who built their own mosques and occupied 'fine mansions,' and who had been present in the long-distance maritime trade for centuries and appear to have become dominant already in the mid-fourteenth century, after the Muslim conquest of Gujarat.¹⁸⁸ Pires mentions such 'Cairo merchants settled in Cambay, and many Khorasans and Guilans from Aden and Ormuz, all of whom do a great trade in the seaport towns of Cambay...'¹⁸⁹ There were also, within this group, many Muslim merchants from abroad who did not settle in Cambay or elsewhere on the Gujarati coast but were sojourners—Barbosa writes that these 'are quite white.'¹⁹⁰ Then, separate from these, there were important Ismā'īlī groups in coastal Gujarat which, according to tradition, all originated in the reign of Siddharaja (1094–1143).¹⁹¹ The Ismā'īlī communities of Bohras and Khojas became larger in Gujarat than anywhere else in India, largely through conversion. Thanks to their connections with non-Muslim mercantile groups they were relatively successful in penetrating inland markets in western India as well, and they made their presence felt in many parts of the western Indian Ocean littoral. In addition to the Ismā'īlīs, there were numerous other Muslim communities that consisted largely of Indian converts or were the product of intermarriage, and that expanded over time. The Nāvayats of Rander and north Canara were one such group, who would trade in their own ships as far as Malacca.¹⁹² But converts were numerically important in all 'coastal towns with Moors.'

¹⁸⁵ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 35–42.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Cf. *Al-Hind*, II, p. 274.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Arasaratnam and Ray, *Masulipatnam and Cambay*, pp. 120–1; *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 274–5.

¹⁸⁹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 41–42.

¹⁹⁰ *Duarte Barbosa*, I, pp. 141–51.

¹⁹¹ *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 274–5.

¹⁹² *Duarte Barbosa*, I, pp. 141–51.

Another distinct community of the Gujarati coastal world, growing in importance under the Muslim kings but neither Muslim nor Hindu itself, were the Parsis.¹⁹³ The Parsis had settled along the coast of Gujarat from the eighth century onwards.¹⁹⁴ From their original settlements in Sanjan they spread out north to Cambay, Broach, Variav, and Surat, and southwards to Thana.¹⁹⁵ By the time of the Muslim conquest, in the last decade of the thirteenth century, the Parsi community of Gujarat had increased considerably due to continued immigration from Iran and northern India. What happened to it under early Muslim rule is not certain. Amir Khusrau writes that 'the shores of the sea of Gujarat were full of the blood of the Gabres,' an observation which has been taken to mean that they were persecuted or forced to convert by Muslim rulers.¹⁹⁶ The same author also observes that 'among those who had become subject to Islam were the Maghs who delighted in the worship of fire.'¹⁹⁷ What is beyond doubt is that numerous Parsis, possibly the vast majority of them, did not convert to Islam. Whatever the extent of (forced) conversion, there were many Parsis who stayed within the ancestral Zoroastrian tradition and who have been closely associated particularly with the rise of Surat from the end of the fourteenth century onwards. In 1478 this community sent a scholar to Kirman in order to fill gaps in its knowledge of Zoroastrian doctrine. Everywhere in Gujarat, the Parsis appear to have been mostly occupied in ship-building and trade (including the liquor trade), and to a lesser extent also in a range of other professions, including agriculture.¹⁹⁸ One author of the seventeenth century calls them 'the busiest people in the world.'¹⁹⁹ By then their importance had increased further, and they had started to dress like Hindus, spoke Gujarati, had adopted Hinduized names, practiced polygamy, child marriage and the seclu-

¹⁹³ M. Kamarkar, 'Parsees in Surat from the 16th to middle 19th century: their social, economic and political dynamics', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay*, 70, new series (1995), pp. 71–88; M. Kamarkar, 'Parsees in Navsari from the 12th to the 18th Centuries. A Study of Survival and Identity' (Paper, Second International Congress, 5–8 January 1995, K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, Bombay, pp. 195–220).

¹⁹⁴ *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 104–8.

¹⁹⁵ Kamarkar, 'Parsees in Surat', p. 71.

¹⁹⁶ Kamarkar, 'Parsees in Navsari', pp. 197–9.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Kamarkar, 'Parsees in Surat', p. 72.

¹⁹⁹ Mandelslo, quoted in Kamarkar, 'Parsees in Surat', p. 72.

sion of women, while maintaining a high degree of religious exclusiveness at the same time.

Numerous contemporary authors have pointed at the existence of a diaspora of Gujarati merchants far beyond Gujarat, and here too it is not always clear which of the above groups were actually present in this diaspora, and on what basis. Even as early as the twelfth to fourteenth centuries there is evidence of 'Indian' participation in trade as far as Qays, Aden, Hormuz, and even China.²⁰⁰ These Indians may have been Jains, Hindus, or Indian Muslims, c.q. Indian converts to Islam, or a mixture of all these. It is beyond doubt that in the fifteenth century Jain and/or Hindu merchants from Gujarat could be encountered in Calicut. Cabral observed that

'there are great merchants who are called Guzerates who are from a province which is called Combaia. These and the natives are idolaters and adore the sun and the moon and cows . . . These Guzerate merchants eat nothing which receives death, nor do they eat bread or drink wine.'²⁰¹

According to Barbosa the 'Heathen merchants' of Cambay were present in Calicut, Cochin and Cannanore, and dwelt there 'in great houses and streets of their own, as the Jews are wont to dwell in our land.'²⁰² The Gujaratis used to have large factories in Calicut, but throughout Malabar they appear to have left the sea trade to the Muslims. Barbosa writes that 'the Moors . . . in Malabar . . . hold all the sea trade and navigation . . .'²⁰³ If this was the situation, it stood in sharp contrast to that in Malacca. In Malacca the 'Cambay merchants' had their chief overseas trading centre, and in this city there used to be a thousand of them, 'besides four or five thousand Gujarat seamen, who came and went.'²⁰⁴ At an even earlier date, prior to the rise of Malacca, the Gujaratis used to trade with Java via the Sunda strait, obtaining the products of the Moluccas, Timor and Banda in Grise.²⁰⁵

There was, according to Pires, 'no trading place where you do not see Gujarat merchants.'²⁰⁶ The Gujaratis were outstanding sea-

²⁰⁰ *Al-Hind*, II, p. 274.

²⁰¹ Brooks Greenlee, *Voyages of Pedro Alvares Cabral*, p. 81.

²⁰² *Duarte Barbosa*, II, p. 73.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 74; and cf. Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 45.

²⁰⁴ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 42-47.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

men and had larger ships than other people on India's western seaboard, and more men to man them.²⁰⁷ Both the native Gujaratis and the foreign Muslim merchants who settled in Cambay sailed their ships to all ports between Aden and Malacca every year.²⁰⁸ Merchants came to Cambay from Cairo, Aden, Hormuz, Mogadishu and Kilwa, and virtually all other major ports in the Indian Ocean.²⁰⁹ Unfortunately, we know almost nothing specific about the conditions in which Jain or Hindu merchants from Gujarat were living in the Muslim world in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. A recent study of similar Indian diaspora merchants from Multan and elsewhere, however, strongly suggests that in the early modern period most of these were sojourners, who would return home after a stay of several years abroad, did not settle abroad permanently, and did not intermarry with the locals.²¹⁰ It seems very likely that the same was true for many of the Gujarati Jains and Hindus who came to the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, Malacca, Java, and elsewhere, although it may have been less the case in Malabar. If so, their situation was radically different from the Muslims of various origins who settled everywhere along the shores of the Indian Ocean. It has been estimated that in the early modern era, there were about 35,000 heavily capitalized, caste-based agents of Indian family firms scattered in diaspora communities across Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, the Caucasus, and as far as Moscow and St. Petersburg.²¹¹ Abroad, these Indians normally enjoyed the protection of the state, operating a cash nexus which extended into the countryside, significantly enhancing the monetization of their host societies. As agents of extended family firms, they regularly rotated in and out of the diaspora, establishing no more than temporary communal residences in caravanserais. The communities of Indians abroad comprised Indian Muslims as well, but the vast majority were Hindus, and there were Jains among them too. Some settled in Turan for longer periods of time and owned commercial and residential property. Religious ceremonies were overseen by brahmins and sometimes restricted (as with cre-

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²¹⁰ S. C. Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and its Trade, 1550–1900* (Leiden, 2002).

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 261–2.

mations) but rarely if ever forbidden.²¹² Most accounts suggest that Indian merchants lived in diaspora communities in Turan and elsewhere for periods of two to three years, after which they would return to India, while only some stayed much longer. Two to three years appears to have been the norm among Indian commercial communities in nineteenth-century Southeast Asia as well. This again seems to suggest that these communities, everywhere, were almost exclusively male.

Like Gujarat, the Konkan coast had some of the oldest Muslim settlements in India. A flourishing Arab mercantile culture in the Konkan can be dated back to the early centuries of Islam, when the country began to supply teakwood for Arabian shipbuilding.²¹³ By the tenth century, Saymūr, to the south of present-day Bombay, was an important port of the Rashtrakuta kingdom, and had perhaps the largest Muslim settlement on the westcoast, with roots in Arabia and the Persian Gulf, but already mostly born in al-Hind of Muslim parents.²¹⁴ The genealogical links of these earliest Muslim communities to any of the later and better-known categories of Konkani Muslims are obscure. More particularly, of the Nāvayats, the elite Shāfiʿī Muslims who rose to great prominence as merchants and state officials under the Adil Shahis of Bijapur, we know little more than that they migrated in all likelihood from the Persian Gulf in the thirteenth century, perhaps from Basra, and it is impossible to make out what indigenous elements were assimilated within this category and how exactly they dispersed from their early settlement in Bhatkal along the Canara and Coromandel coasts.²¹⁵ There are few inscriptions and remains of Muslim buildings anywhere on the coasts of the sub-continent.

The two major empires that competed for the control of the Konkani ports were the Bahmanī Sultanate and Vijayanagara. For the Bahmanis the control of the Konkan was vital. Its loss precipitated the disruption of the empire in five successor states in the late fifteenth century. Unable to rely on the sand-clogged ports of their eastern

²¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 122–140.

²¹³ *Al-Hind*, I, p. 68.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²¹⁵ *Al-Hind*, II, pp. 275–6; O. Khalidi, 'Konkani Muslims: An Introduction' (Unpublished paper).

seaboard, the Bahmanis maintained a considerable navy to protect the better ports of the Konkan, particularly against Gujarat (with which they competed for the control of the island of Mahim).²¹⁶ Having taken possession of Dabhol and Chaul from the beginning, the first of these became the chief port of the Deccan, where many of the horses imported to the Bahmani empire were landed.²¹⁷ Dabhol had 'a very good harbour, whither sail many ships of the Moors from divers lands . . .'²¹⁸ Goa (the Sindabūr of the Arabs) was another port where every year many 'ships of the Moors' laden with horses and other goods came from Hormuz, Aden, Cambay and Malabar. It was intermittently under the control of the Bahmanis and Vijayanagara until Mahmud Gawan was able to bring the local Hindu chiefs in line by cutting down the surrounding forests in the later fifteenth century.²¹⁹ Further to the south, on the Canara coast, the ports of Mangalore and Cumbola were prized Vijayanagara possessions.²²⁰ It was Bhatkal that became the most important port to serve Vijayanagara with horses. It was ruled by a Canarese 'Heathen' chief whose domain extended a long way inland, but there were 'Moors of all nations' in the city.²²¹

If it was common for the 'sea-havens' of the Deccan—Chaul, Danda, Bankot, Dabhol, Sangameshwar, Kharepatan, Bamba, Goa, Honawar, Bhatkal, Majandur, Bacanor and Bracalor, Mangalore, and Cumbola—to be ruled by land-based empires, they at the same time served both as emporia or transit points in the trade of the Indian Ocean and as export ports for the agricultural products of the Deccan hinterland.²²² Thus in Chaul could be found the spices from Malabar but also 'merchants from inland . . . [who] bring their goods laden on great droves of trained oxen with pack-saddles.'²²³ Such goods included grains, rice (including 'very bad black rice'), millet, and textiles.²²⁴ The other ports exported them as well.²²⁵

²¹⁶ H. K. Sherwani, *The Bahmanis of the Deccan* (New Delhi, 1985), pp. 8–10; *TA*, pp. 214, 278.

²¹⁷ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 52–53; *Duarte Barbosa*, I, pp. 165–6.

²¹⁸ *Duarte Barbosa*, I, pp. 165–6.

²¹⁹ Sherwani, *Bahmanis*, p. 10; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 54; *Duarte Barbosa*, I, pp. 169–78.

²²⁰ *Duarte Barbosa*, I, pp. 195–7.

²²¹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 60–62.

²²² *Duarte Barbosa*, I, pp. 158–96; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 48–60.

²²³ *Duarte Barbosa*, I, pp. 159, 163.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 160–1.

²²⁵ *Duarte Barbosa*, I, pp. 164–5, 195–6.

Bhatkal was the port from which Hormuz got its rice.²²⁶ In the inland and coastal trade of these goods many Hindus were involved. All ports on the Konkan and Canara coasts were inhabited by 'Moors and Heathen.' But the long-distance overseas trade was, as far as can be made out, entirely in the hands of Muslims, at least by the fifteenth century.

It was the same in Malabar. And yet, even here, although by the end of the fifteenth century this part of the Indian coast was relatively well known in commercial circles in Florence, Venice and Genoa, the illusion of a Christian India was still alive when Vasco da Gama set foot in Calicut and did not die until after the return of Cabral in 1501 AD.²²⁷ Pedro Alvares Cabral was the first European to fully acknowledge that the vast majority of Indians were 'idolaters' rather than Christians. In his own words:

'The king [of Calicut] is an idolater, although others have believed that they are Christians. . . . Almost all his nobles and the people who serve him are men dark as Moors.'²²⁸

It did not take long for these early Portuguese navigators to understand that there had in fact been important Christian communities in Malabar since ancient times but that their importance had been steadily diminishing. Pires estimated the total number of Christians in Malabar to be 15,000, and he was aware that these dated back to the time of St Thomas the Apostle.²²⁹ Barbosa says there were possibly as many as 12,000 Christian households between Cochin and Kollam/Quilon alone.²³⁰ But in Malabar too, commercial life, especially that of the coasts and searoutes, from the thirteenth century onwards had become more and more dominated by foreign or 'Paradeshi' Muslims and by the indigenous groups of Muslims known as 'Mappillas.'²³¹ Neither of these groups were able to create states. Political power in Malabar always remained in the hands of Hindu

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 187; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 60.

²²⁷ G. Bouchon, 'Le sud-ouest de l'Inde dans l'imaginaire européen au début du XVI siècle: du mythe à la réalité,' in: D. Lombard and R. Ptak (eds), *Asia Maritima: images et réalité, Bilder und Wirklichkeit, 1200-1800* (Wiesbaden, 1994), pp. 3-11.

²²⁸ Brooks Greenlee, *Voyages of Pedro Alvares Cabral*, p. 79.

²²⁹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 73.

²³⁰ *Duarte Barbosa*, II, pp. 95-101.

²³¹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 73; *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 67-104.

kings even when it depended to a very large degree on the successful patronage of the ever increasing Muslim trade.

Initially, in the thirteenth century, the rise of the 'Samudri Raja' or 'Ocean King'—the later Zamorin—of Calicut had been made possible by the commercial victory of the Karimis of Cairo over their Chinese rivals in Kollam.²³² Other city-states followed suit, allying themselves with other Muslim traders from overseas. All of these 'Heathen' kings privileged the Muslims, since trade was essential to them as much as their authority in the countryside remained limited.²³³ The Zamorin's dominion remained the wealthiest of a string of city-states along the coast which served both as maritime entrepôts and as export harbours for the finest pepper in the world. Even the Zamorin had no more than a form of suzerainty over the interior chieftains. Moreover, even though they successfully maintained powerful navies of Mappillas to safeguard their trade, on land the same kings and their Nāyar nobilities were in a state of perpetual warfare with each other.²³⁴ '[Besides the Zamorin of Calicut] there are many great Lords in the Land who wish to be called Kings, which they are not, for they neither coin money, nor roof houses with tiles . . .'²³⁵ Malabar in fact consisted of an extremely fractious congeries of small harbour monarchies which facilitated and safeguarded maritime trade and the export of pepper but were politically inconsequential. On land the Zamorin could but defer to the Vijayanagara emperor. As the Timurid envoy Abd ar-Razzaq observed: 'although the Sameri is not subject to the laws of the king of Bidjanagar [Vijayanagara], he nevertheless pays him respect, and stands extremely in fear of him.'²³⁶

With the agrarian economy of rice, pepper, coconut, myrobalans, and ginger production entirely dominated by a Nāyar military caste and nobility which, together with the Nambutiri brahmans, propped up small Hindu monarchies, the trade of the few dozen port towns of Malabar—Calicut, Cannanore, Ponnani, Veleankode, Chetwayi, Cranganore, Cochin, Kayankulam, Kollam, Travancore, and Comorin

²³² *Al-Hind*, II, p. 276.

²³³ *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 75–76.

²³⁴ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 81; *Al-Hind*, II, p. 278; Major, *India*, I, p. 19.

²³⁵ *Duarte Barbosa*, II, p. 6.

²³⁶ Major, *India*, I, pp. 17–19.

the most important of them—was left in the hands of the Muslims.²³⁷ Or nearly so. The exceptions were the Gujarati banias of Calicut, Cochin and Cannanore,²³⁸ the Malāyali caste of the Vyābāris which traded mainly inland,²³⁹ and the Tamil commercial caste of the Chettis, ‘great merchants of jewels and of pearls and of gold and silver.’²⁴⁰ These aside, from at least the mid-fourteenth century the Muslims continued to dominate the expanding maritime trade of Malabar, even though the Chinese briefly reduced Calicut to tributary status in 1406–7—when their great fleet lay anchored there for some months. After the Chinese gave up their factory in Calicut and abandoned the city for Malacca two or three decades later, the merchants in Malabar who traded on the sea were almost exclusively Muslims.²⁴¹ According to Ludovico di Varthema, ‘the pagans do not navigate much, but it is the Moors who carry the merchandise; for in Calicut there are at least fifteen thousand Moors, who are for the greater part natives of the country.’²⁴² Paradeshi Muslims or ‘Mouros da Meca’ were also present in very large numbers, either as seasonal sojourners or as permanent residents. These came from anywhere between Mecca and Sumatra, ‘with their wives and sons,’ and inhabited very fine houses, with numerous servants, and they dressed themselves ‘in magnificent apparel after the manner of the Arabs,’ while keeping up a luxurious lifestyle ‘in eating, drinking and sleeping.’²⁴³ This was the situation not only in Calicut but all over the Malabar coast.

²³⁷ *Al-Hind*, I, p. 72; *Duarte Barbosa*, II, pp. 7, 38, 49, 70, 73, 92; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 74–84; Major, *India*, I, p. 19.

²³⁸ See above, pp. 199–200, and *Duarte Barbosa*, II, p. 73.

²³⁹ *Al-Hind*, I, p. 75.

²⁴⁰ Brooks Greenlee, *Voyages of Alvares Cabral*, p. 81; Mills, *Ma Huan*, p. 138; *Duarte Barbosa*, II, pp. 70–71; *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 71, 75.

²⁴¹ Brooks Greenlee, *Voyages of Alvares Cabral*, p. 109; see also R. Ptak, ‘Ein muster-gultiges “Barbarenland”? Kalikut nach chinesischen Quellen der Yuan- und Ming-Zeit’, in: R. Ptak and D. Lombard (eds), *Asia Maritima: Images et réalité, Bilder und Wirklichkeit 1200–1800* (Wiesbaden, 1994), pp. 79–116; *Al-Hind*, I, p. 70; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 82.

²⁴² Winter Jones, *Itinerary of Duovico di Varthema*, p. 61; Ma Huan, at an earlier date, estimated the settled Muslim population in Calicut at 30,000 (Cf. Chapter II, p. 72).

²⁴³ *Duarte Barbosa*, II, pp. 74–78; Brooks Greenlee, *Voyages of Alvares Cabral*, p. 109; Major, *India*, I, pp. 13–17; Winter Jones, *Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema*, p. 61; Wink, *Al-Hind*, II, p. 278.

'Moors are so many and rooted in the soil throughout Malabar that it seems . . . they are a fifth part of its people spread over all its kingdoms and provinces. They are rich, and live well, they hold all the sea trade and navigation in such sort that if the King of Portugal had not discovered India, Malabar would already have been in the hands of the Moors, and would have had a Moorish king . . .'²⁴⁴

As it was, the Muslims of Calicut merely had a Muslim governor of their own, and other Muslims of Malabar had their own 'harbour authorities' (shahbandars) who regulated succession and inheritance problems.²⁴⁵ While Muslim notables maintained close relations with the dominant landholding caste of the Nāyars and took part in the royal councils, and while they were patronized and protected by Hindu kings who allowed them the free exercise of their religion, the Mappillas or 'Mouros da Terra' followed the 'Heathen custom' in many ways.²⁴⁶ Having multiplied through intermarriage with local women and keeping 'heathen concubines of low caste,' they were ethnically quite diverse, spoke Malayalam, dressed like the Nayers, and adopted matrilineality.²⁴⁷ But they always stressed their Arab roots and their coastal affiliations with other coastal Muslim communities in Arabia, the Persian Gulf, the Coromandel, and the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, who, like them, adhered to the Shafi'i madhhab of Islamic law, unlike the more recently converted Turks and Afghans of the subcontinent.²⁴⁸ Many Malabar Muslims also came to settle on the 'very populous' island of Sri Lanka.²⁴⁹ Here the most important king was a tributary of the king of Kollam, sending forty elephants per year.²⁵⁰ With its economy of ivory, cinnamon, arecanuts, and precious stones, Sri Lanka occupied an important place in the trade of the Indian Ocean, and a situation developed which was not unlike that on the Malabar coast, in which the kings were 'Heathen' but, subject to them, there were 'many Moors' in its seaports—in Colombo, Negombo, and Galle, among others.²⁵¹ The Laccadive islands (known as the Juzur al-Fāl or al-Fālāt to the

²⁴⁴ *Duarte Barbosa, II*, pp. 74–78, and see pp. 79–89.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 74–78; *Al-Hind, I*, p. 74.

²⁴⁷ *Duarte Barbosa, II*, pp. 74–78; *Al-Hind, I*, p. 75, *II*, p. 276.

²⁴⁸ *Al-Hind, I*, pp. 76–78.

²⁴⁹ *Duarte Barbosa, II*, p. 111; Pires, *Suma Oriental, I*, p. 84.

²⁵⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental, I*, p. 87.

²⁵¹ *Duarte Barbosa, II*, pp. 110–3; Pires, *Suma Oriental, I*, pp. 84–87.

Arab navigators) were also inhabited by Malabar Muslims and belonged to the king of Cannanore in the early sixteenth century, and earlier had been in the possession of the Kolattiri rajas, while the Chinese also claimed sovereignty over these islands for a while and sent one or two treasure-ships there.²⁵² A lot of bad black rice was sent from the Canara coast to the 'poor Moors' of both the Laccadives and Maldives (al-Dīb) in exchange for coir made out of coconut husks.²⁵³ There were no cities or even villages here; the biggest islands counted about one thousand houses, others five hundred or less, and on many there were five to ten human habitations.²⁵⁴ Some of these islands, however, have been important centres for shipbuilding (as well as graveyards for ships), and supplied cauries, ambergris, dried fish, and slaves throughout the Indian Ocean, while serving as important stopovers on much-traveled searoutes.²⁵⁵ Already by the thirteenth century they had adopted Sunni Islam and the Shafi'i madhhab.²⁵⁶

Like those of Malabar, the towns of the Coromandel coast in medieval times served both as entrepôts of Indian Ocean trade generally and as ports for their own hinterlands. Among the items that reached the Red Sea and Cairo from the Coromandel there were many of Chinese and Indonesian origin, like spices, porcelain and brass and bronze vessels, but also locally produced cotton products, silk, pearls, iron and steel, dyeing and varnishing plants, drugs, aromatics, ivory, rhinoceros horn, and so on.²⁵⁷ Under Rajaraja the Great (985–1014), the port of Nagapattinam (in the Kaveri delta) replaced Mamallapuram of Pallava times, while Mahabalipuram became a secondary port of the Cola empire.²⁵⁸ From here naval expeditions were undertaken in

²⁵² Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 458–61; Duarte Barbosa, *II*, pp. 103–4; Mills, *Ma Huan*, pp. 146–51.

²⁵³ Duarte Barbosa, *I*, pp. 196–7.

²⁵⁴ M. A. H. Fitzler, 'Die Maldiven im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert: Ein Kapitel im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für Indologie und Iranistik*, X (1935), p. 221; Mills, *Ma Huan*, pp. 146–51; R. H. Ellis, *A Short Account of the Laccadive Islands and Minicoy* (Madras, 1924).

²⁵⁵ Duarte Barbosa, *II*, pp. 107–108; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, *I*, pp. 94–95, 169; Bouchon and Thomaz, *Voyage*, p. 158; and see Chapter III, p. 99.

²⁵⁶ *Al-Hind*, *II*, pp. 283–5.

²⁵⁷ *Al-Hind*, *I*, p. 334.

²⁵⁸ R. Chakravarti, 'Rulers and Ports: Visakhapattanam and Mottupalli in Early Medieval Andhra', in: K. S. Mathew (ed.), *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History* (New Delhi, 1995), p. 6; S. Jeyaseela Stephen, *The Coromandel Coast*

the eleventh century to support new commercial and political/diplomatic networks converging on Sung China, and the entire Bay of Bengal was, in effect, turned into a 'Cola lake.'²⁵⁹ Under the Colas, Buddhism and Jainism continued to be patronized in the ports, while the Tamil devotional cult also retained a strong imprint of these heterodox religions.²⁶⁰ Donations to Buddhist viharas and Jain shrines accompanied maritime trading diplomacy. And there were Tamil-speaking merchants in the Chinese port city of Quanzhou up to at least the later thirteenth century, just as there were in Sumatra and other parts of Southeast Asia. These appear to have included Muslims, Buddhists, as well as Hindus, occupying 'foreign quarters,' but in all likelihood consisted overwhelmingly of sojourners.²⁶¹ Similarly, the entire coast south of Nagapattinam and Podge (Pondicherry) was frequented by sojourning Chinese merchants until about the mid-fourteenth century.²⁶² But Chinese visits to the Coromandel coast appear to have become rare after they had abandoned Calicut in the thirties and forties of the fifteenth century.²⁶³ Chinese sources, after that date, do not mention the Coromandel.

Muslim settlement, by contrast, steadily gained momentum in the great age of Cola expansion, from about the eleventh century on, and continued in subsequent centuries, at the same time that Muslim merchants from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf were beginning to use Coromandel ports as intermediary stations in the China trade and in the spice trade with Indonesia.²⁶⁴ Conversion to Islam among

and its Hinterland: Economy, Society and Political System (A.D. 1500–1600) (New Delhi, 1997), p. 14.

²⁵⁹ *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 311–34; J. Guy, 'Tamil merchant guilds and the Quanzhou trade', in: A. Schottenhammer (ed.), *The Emporium of the World: Maritime Quanzhou, 1000–1400* (Leiden, 2000), p. 288; T. Sen, 'Maritime Contacts between China and the Cola Kingdom (A.D. 850–1279)', in: K. S. Mathew (ed.), *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History* (New Delhi, 1995), pp. 28–29.

²⁶⁰ *Al-Hind*, I, pp. 311–2.

²⁶¹ Guy, 'Tamil merchant guilds', pp. 287–8, 290, 293, 295, 298; Sen, 'Maritime Contacts', pp. 32–34.

²⁶² Guy, 'Tamil Guilds', p. 284; Jeyaseela Stephen, *The Coromandel Coast*, p. 15; S. Jeyaseela Stephen, 'Medieval Trade of the Tamil Coast and its Hinterland, A.D. 1280–1500', *The Indian Historical Review*, XXV, 2 (January, 1999), pp. 1–37.

²⁶³ H. Ray, 'Trade between South India and China, 1368–1644', in: O. Prakash and D. Lombard (eds), *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal, 1500–1800* (New Delhi, 1999), pp. 38–39; H. Ray, 'An enquiry into the presence of the Chinese in South and South-east Asia after the voyages of Zheng He in the early fifteenth century', in: Mathew, *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans*, pp. 97–99.

²⁶⁴ *Al-Hind*, I, p. 78; II, p. 280.

the local populations of the Coromandel seaboard also appears to have started relatively early, in any case no later than the thirteenth century. The Tamil-speaking Muslims of the coast who were known as 'Labbai,' and later came to be called Maraikkāyar or Kayalar, have always boasted a distinct Arab-Shāfi'ite origin, in order to be able to distinguish themselves from the rural Tamil Muslims of the hinterland whom they stigmatized as converts of a later date.²⁶⁵ Like the Mappillas, the coastal Labbai had few links with the Muslims of the Karnataka, the Deccan and North India, preferring marriage connections with non-Tamil Shāfi'ites of Sri Lanka, Malabar and Indonesia. Physically mobile, their ranks included wealthy maritime traders and shipping magnates, as well as large numbers of fishermen, pearl divers and maritime labourers.²⁶⁶ Many Labbai turned to gem and pearl dealing, controlling networks of trade as far as Java.

By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, we read, there were in the Coromandel seaports 'many Moors, natives of the land, who are great merchants and own many ships,' and who traded with Malabar, Cambay, Malacca, China and Bengal.²⁶⁷ These coastal towns had a mixed population of 'Moors and Heathen' and were ruled by Hindu kings who patronized both communities. Among the Hindu merchants, the Chettis stood out as the most important and the most widely dispersed. The Chettis were natives of the Coromandel 'of high standing' who dealt in precious stones and seed-pearls and lived 'throughout India.'²⁶⁸ The 'very corpulent' Chettis constituted probably the majority of the great Kalinga merchants that traded on a large scale in Malacca.²⁶⁹ The latter appear to have been sojourners, paying dues of 6% rather than the standard 3% for permanent residents.²⁷⁰

Kāyalpatanam or 'Old Kāyal,' having become the centre of the Muslim horse trade as well as the major outlet of the pearl industry in the thirteenth century, is described in 1530 as 'the chief place

²⁶⁵ Wink, *Al-Hind*, I, p. 78, II, pp. 280, 282.

²⁶⁶ S. Bayly, 'Islam in Southern India: "Purist" or "Syncretic"?', in: C. A. Bayly and D. H. A. Kolff (eds), *Two Colonial Empires: Comparative Essays on the History of India and Indonesia in the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, 1986), p. 37.

²⁶⁷ Duarte Barbosa, II, pp. 124-6.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 123, 125-6.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 177; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, p. 255.

²⁷⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, pp. 249, 272-3. Kalinga merchants in Malacca do appear to have brought their families along, even though they were sojourners (see below, p. 219).

along the Tamil coast inhabited by Muhammadans.²⁷¹ Here, as elsewhere, the Labbai were patronized by Hindu kings and were never isolated from popular Islam and Hindu society as their later traditions have it. The political situation was in a constant flux. Up to 1439 AD the city was under the authority of Vijayanagara but from the middle of the fifteenth century it was incorporated in the coastal domain of the kings of Kollam, hence effectively part of the Malabar coast.²⁷² The king of Kollam also successfully disputed Vijayanagara's authority over Kilakarai, another important centre of the Labbai horses and pearl trade. Barbosa describes Kilakarai as

'a land belonging to the king of Coulam [Quilon] and to other lords who are subject to him . . . wherein are many and great towns of the Heathen and many others with havens on the sea where dwell many Moors, natives of the land.'²⁷³

By contrast, Pulicat was a port that remained under Vijayanagara authority, exporting an abundance of printed cotton cloths of the Coromandel to Malacca, Pegu, Sumatra, Gujarat, and Malabar, and with 'a very fair sea-haven whither resort ships of the Moors in great numbers.'²⁷⁴

North of the Coromandel, the development of ports like Visakhapatnam and Mottupalli reflected the growing importance of the Andhra coast within the context of the expanding trade of the Bay of Bengal generally.²⁷⁵ Exporting diamonds and textiles from its own hinterland, Mottupalli gradually superseded Visakhapatnam from the 1240s, when the Kakatiyas began to show interest in this part of the coast, which they called 'Vengi.' By the later part of the fourteenth century the port was incorporated in the Vijayanagara empire. A crucial difference between these ports and the ports of Gujarat, Malabar and the Coromandel was that they were off the major maritime trading routes and hence had a far more circumscribed and regional function, while they offered no transshipment facilities.²⁷⁶ Here no significant Muslim presence is recorded. And the same can

²⁷¹ Quoted in Bayly, 'Islam in Southern India', p. 40.

²⁷² *Duarte Barbosa, II*, pp. 122-3, and note 1.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-1.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-132.

²⁷⁵ Chakravarti, 'Rulers and Ports', pp. 60-72.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

be seen in Orissa under Gajapati rule, a 'kingdom [which] extends far inland and has but few seaports and little trade.'²⁷⁷

Bengal, on the other hand, is described as a wealthy Muslim kingdom, with 'wide and thickly peopled lands' and many towns both inland and on the coast—Gaur (two days from the mouths of the Ganges), and Sonārgaon and Satgaon (near the mouths of the two principal branches of the Ganges) being the most important ones until the early sixteenth century—inhabited by 'Moors and Heathen.'²⁷⁸ The Muslim king of Bengal surrounded himself with 'white men,' strangers from many lands, including Arabs, Persians, and Indians, and he governed his realm through Abyssinians.²⁷⁹ There were many wealthy Muslim merchants and shipbuilders in the seaports of Bengal, and Parsis as well, dominating the trade in great and small ships with many countries.²⁸⁰ Bengal exported 'goods of many sorts,' including eunuchs, and was among the most important sources of fine muslins and a broad range of other textiles, large quantities of which were exported to Malacca and as far east as China, in exchange for pepper and spices, or opium, and precious metals.²⁸¹

The conspicuous display of wealth and luxurious lifestyle enjoyed by the Muslim mercantile elite of Bengal has been graphically described by Barbosa. 'The respectable Moors,' he writes,

'walk about clad in white cotton smocks, very thin, which come down to their ankles, and beneath these they have girdles of cloth, and over them silk scarves, they carry in their girdles daggers garnished with silver and gold, according to the rank of the person who carries them; on their fingers many rings set with rich jewels, and cotton turbans on their heads. They are luxurious, eat well and spend freely, and have many other extravagancies as well. . . . Every one has three or four wives or as many as he can maintain. They keep them carefully shut up, and treat them very well . . . They never go forth from the house save at night to visit one another, at which time they have great festivities and rejoicings, and superfluity of

²⁷⁷ Duarte Barbosa, *II*, p. 133.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 135, 140, 148; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, *I*, pp. 90–91.

²⁷⁹ Duarte Barbosa, *II*, pp. 135, 137, 139; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, *I*, p. 86.

²⁸⁰ Duarte Barbosa, *II*, pp. 135, 142.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 145–7; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, *I*, pp. 92–93; H. Ray, 'Bengal's Textile Products Involved in Ming Trade during Cheng Ho's Voyages to the Indian Ocean and Identification of the Hitherto Undeciphered Textiles', in: R. Ptak and D. Rothermund (eds), *Emporia, Commodities and Entrepreneurs in Asian Maritime Trade, c. 1400–1750* (Stuttgart, 1991), pp. 81–93.

wines, of which they make many kinds, for the most part from palm-sugar, much whereof is consumed among these women.²⁸²

The native Bengalis are described as 'sleek, handsome black men, more sharpwitted than the men of any other known race . . . [and] very treacherous.'²⁸³ There were many great merchants among them too, with large fortunes.²⁸⁴ And a large number of Bengalis, both men and women, were found in Malacca, most of them 'fishers and sailors.'²⁸⁵ Many of these 'Heathen' were converting to Islam, on a daily basis, 'to gain the favour of their rulers.'²⁸⁶

The Muslims of Bengal, with their vast resources and trading networks, in the fifteenth century appear to have been able to project their power as far south as Chittagong, and, more fleetingly, onto the relatively isolated and poor Arakan coast of Burma where they became instrumental in the foundation and rise to power of the port of Mrauk-U.²⁸⁷ According to an Arakanese tradition, in 1406 the reigning Arakanese king of the Laungkarak dynasty was forced to flee to Bengal when his capital was invaded by Burmese troops sent by the king of Ava.²⁸⁸ The exiled king, Naramitha, returned to Arakan in 1428, allegedly with the support of Muslim troops provided by the Sultan of Bengal.²⁸⁹ Mrauk-U was founded soon afterwards, and between 1434 and 1481 was able to establish naval control over other river-based port cities of the Arakan littoral, everywhere south of Chittagong. This was achieved by raiding and occupation, without penetrating deeply into the hinterland anywhere, while adopting a compromising policy towards the kings of Ava in Upper Burma from whom the Arakanese were separated by the Arakan Yoma.²⁹⁰ The king of Mrauk-U was essentially a coastal ruler of no more than regional significance, a 'Heathen' outside the orbit of Muslim trade

²⁸² Duarte Barbosa, *II*, pp. 147–8.

²⁸³ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, *I*, pp. 86, 93.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁸⁵ Duarte Barbosa, *II*, p. 93.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

²⁸⁷ S. Subrahmanyam, 'And a River runs through it: The Mrauk-U Kingdom and its Bay of Bengal Context', in: J. Gommans and J. Leider (eds), *The Maritime Frontier of Burma: Exploring Political, Cultural and Commercial Interaction in the Indian Ocean World, 1200–1800* (Leiden, 2002), p. 109; J. Leider, 'On Arakanese Territorial Expansion: Origins, Context, Means and Practice,' *ibid.*, pp. 128–9.

²⁸⁸ Leider, 'On Arakanese Territorial Expansion', p. 128.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 129–43.

and without a productive hinterland economy.²⁹¹ By contrast, the Shan kingdom of Ava, which controlled Upper Burma in the fifteenth century, was primarily an agrarian realm, abounding in food, but it was also widely known for its trade in rubies and musk, and did attract some Muslims and Chettis to its capital who exchanged these items for copper, quicksilver, or opium.²⁹² In this it was different, again, from the Burmese kingdom of Taungū or 'Berma,' of which Barbosa says that 'there are no Moors therein inasmuch as it has no seaport which they can use for their traffic.'²⁹³ Pegu, further to the south, was a 'Heathen realm of great fertility and with much trade by sea in many kinds of goods.'²⁹⁴ It had three or four ports which were 'inhabited as well by Moors as by the Heathen who possess it' and had trading links with Malacca, Pulicat and Cambay.²⁹⁵ The importance of such overseas trading links within the overall agrarian economy of Upper and Lower Burma should not be exaggerated, however, as in the other states of mainland Southeast Asia.²⁹⁶ None of these states ever abandoned their essentially agrarian underpinnings. Foreign Muslim traders were not 'liked' here, not even in Ayudhya [Siam], which conducted more overseas trade, especially with China (in Chinese ships), than any other mainland state, and did have a significant Muslim and Chinese presence in its seaports, all the way down to Tenasserim and Phuket.²⁹⁷ Muslims of these ports were often not permitted to travel inland, let alone settle there permanently, and were not permitted to bear arms.

Off the mainland, at least some of the numerous islands of the Andaman, Nicobar and Mergui archipelagos were known to the Arab navigators, although not well, and nowhere on these islands, except on a few of the Mergui archipelago close to the coast of Burma, is there any evidence of permanent Muslim settlement or native

²⁹¹ See also Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 95–96; Duarte Barbosa, II, p. 150.

²⁹² Duarte Barbosa, II, pp. 159–61.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 152–3.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 153–7; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 97–101.

²⁹⁶ See especially Lieberman, 'Local Integration and Eurasian Analogies', pp. 477–80; Michael Aung-Thwin, 'Lower Burma and Bago in the History of Burma,' in: J. Gommans and J. Leider (eds), *The Maritime Frontier of Burma: Exploring Political, Cultural and Commercial Interaction in the Indian Ocean World, 1200–1800* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 25–57.

²⁹⁷ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 103–14; Duarte Barbosa, II, pp. 162–5.

conversion to Islam.²⁹⁸ The Andaman and Nicobar islands together form a cluster of almost three hundred islands in the eastern Bay of Bengal, stretched out over a distance of seven hundred kilometres and separated by a ten-degree channel.²⁹⁹ Sulaiman al-Mahrī divides the Andaman islands into two large ones, with a group of smaller islands to the south, and one or two scattered islands, while he describes the Nicobar islands as two groups of islands and two separate islands, with large straits separating them from the Andamans in the north and from the islands at the end of northern Sumatra in the south.³⁰⁰ Other Arab navigators were also unsure about the general direction of this chain of islands.³⁰¹ Nicolo Conti mentions only one island, calling it Andamania, 'the island of gold,' which he held to have had a circumference of thirteen hundred kilometres and to have been inhabited by cannibals.³⁰² He did not visit any of the islands, and adds that 'no travelers touch here unless driven so to do by bad weather, for when taken they are torn to pieces and devoured by these cruel savages.'³⁰³ Ma Huan, also writing in the fifteenth century, calls the Andaman and Nicobar islands 'the country of the naked people': 'The people of those places dwell in caves; men and women have naked bodies, all without a stitch of clothing, like the bodies of brute beasts.'³⁰⁴ The tribal islanders were skilled navigators and fishermen, as well as good hunters and food-gatherers, and there was some crop cultivation on the Nicobars. Archaeological evidence from the Andaman islands indicates the importance of large-scale exploitation of marine shell-fish for food, and over the centuries cauri shells and dried fish have been important exports of these islands.³⁰⁵ The Nicobars rather than the Andamans afforded good anchorages for early travelers, especially on the route from Sri Lanka to China. Barbosa writes:

²⁹⁸ *Al-Hind*, II, p. 283.

²⁹⁹ See L. P. Mathur, *History of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands* (Delhi, 1968); G. Whitehead, *In the Nicobar Islands* (London, 1924).

³⁰⁰ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 473.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 474.

³⁰² Major, *India*, II, p. 8.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ Mills, *Ma Huan*, pp. 124–9.

³⁰⁵ Z. Cooper, 'Archaeological Evidence of Maritime Contacts: the Andaman Islands', in: H. P. Ray and J.-F. Salles (eds), *Tradition and Archaeology: Early Maritime Contacts in the Indian Ocean* (New Delhi, 1996), pp. 239–46; *Al-Hind*, II, p. 283; Bouchon and Thomaz, *Voyage*, p. 347.

'Passing the island of Ceylon, and crossing the Gulf before arriving at the [great island of Sumatra there are five or six] isles which have very good water and anchorages for shipping, inhabited by poor Heathen; these are called Nacabar. The dwellers therein get much ambergris which is taken to Malacca and other places.'³⁰⁶

The islands of the Mergui archipelago, with its harbour of Markhī, which gave the modern name to this archipelago of an alleged four hundred islands and was renowned for its pearl fisheries, were referred to as the *Juzur at-Tākwā*.³⁰⁷ Tradition has it that in the fifteenth century or thereabout the Ava kings made attempts to teach the nomadic Mawken of this archipelago to read and write Burmese, but apparently without any lasting result.³⁰⁸ There is some Islamic influence among the Mawken, due largely to intermarriage, and scattered Malay groups who live in the villages of some islands, professing to adhere to Islam, but it is not clear when Islam first appeared here.³⁰⁹

It was Malacca that became the most important trading city in the eastern Indian Ocean. It was founded, around the beginning of the fifteenth century, by a fugitive prince of Palembang and a boatful of Orang Laut.³¹⁰ It soon started to pick up traffic from Samudra-Pasai or 'Pase' and other ports of northeast Sumatra that were silting up, its ruling house converting to Islam.³¹¹ If ever there was a port to which the three laws of real estate were applicable it was Malacca: located at a site on a river which was suitable for a large town, at the narrowest part of the strait between Sumatra and the Malay peninsula through which went virtually all the trade between the South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal, it was at the end of the monsoons from two directions.³¹² One of Malacca's kings, Mahmud Shah,

'was so proud and unreasonable and presumptuous about this, that he said that he alone was strong enough to destroy the world, and that the world

³⁰⁶ Duarte Barbosa, *II*, p. 181.

³⁰⁷ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 477-80; White, *Sea Gypsies*, pp. 26, 36, 169.

³⁰⁸ White, *Sea Gypsies*, p. 19.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

³¹⁰ See Chapter III, pp. 117-8; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, *II*, pp. 229-289; Sopher, *Sea Nomads*, pp. 316-7; C. C. Brown (transl.), *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals* (Kuala Lumpur, 1970).

³¹¹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, *II*, p. 239.

³¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 239, 251.

needed his port because it was at the end of the monsoons, and that Malacca was to be made into Mecca . . .³¹³

Ayudhya, Java and China all attempted to maintain authority over the newly founded entrepôt and to subordinate its trading activities to their own interests. They could barely slow down its meteoric rise. With the accession of the Ming dynasty in 1368, trade relations between the emerging Siamese state of Ayudhya and China expanded dramatically and, backed by powerful Chinese mercantile interests, Ayudhya was able to extend its control down the Malay peninsula during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.³¹⁴ During the same period, the Ayudhya king constantly despatched commanders to subject other neighbouring countries in the interior: Sukhothai and Phitsanulok were taken in 1412, and the Khmer capital of Angkor in 1432.³¹⁵ Remaining obedient to China, Ayudhya transformed itself into the most powerful and elaborately organized bureaucratic state of mainland Southeast Asia, characterized by a unique system of quantified ranks known as *sakdi na*.³¹⁶ It exercised sovereignty in Malacca until as late as 1488.

At first, according to the Chinese record, the region where Malacca was founded was known as the 'Five Islands' and was under the authority of a chief who paid an annual tribute in gold to Hsien Lo (Siam), 'and if it were not to pay, the Hsien Lo would send men to attack it.'³¹⁷ Then Muhammad Iskandar Shah, the second ruler of Malacca (1414–1423), sent an embassy to the king of Ayudhya, asking him 'to people the land which was his.'³¹⁸ The king responded by not only sending people, but food and merchandise as well.³¹⁹ Subsequent rulers of Malacca strengthened diplomatic ties with the Thai state, establishing matrimonial connections as well, and presenting elephants to the Thai court, but in the end withdrew all allegiance abruptly, refusing even to send ambassadors, and in the ensuing military confrontation 'destroyed the Siamese on the open sea.'³²⁰

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

³¹⁴ Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, pp. 204–5.

³¹⁵ Mills, *Ma Huan*, p. 107; Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, p. 205.

³¹⁶ Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, p. 205.

³¹⁷ Mills, *Ma Huan*, p. 108.

³¹⁸ Pires, *Suma Oriental, II*, p. 238.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 257, and see pp. 242–53.

Ayudhya continued to claim sovereignty over the entire Malay peninsula until 1511, when the Portuguese captured it, and the four Malay states of Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah and Perlis continued to acknowledge Thai supremacy until as late as 1909.³²¹ In practical terms, however, Malacca had been liberated by the sea—decades before the Portuguese conquest.

The break with Java was achieved around the same time, entirely through the force of expanding commerce. Malacca's founders and Celates-turned-mandarins, and even later rulers like Mansur Shah (1458?–1477) had been more than eager to marry into the Javanese nobility, and ambassadors continued to be sent to the island, with elephants and gifts, but when the Javanese seaports established their independence from Majapahit and (aided by 'priests' sent by Malacca) turned to Islam, the relationship changed.³²² Majapahit was left with merely the Javanese hinterland and could not make war on Malacca because it was powerless on the sea, and therefore 'the king of Java did not care about Malacca nor about its obedience.'³²³

China's role in the rise of Malacca had been crucial from very early times, probably ever since some Muslim merchants from South India first brought Malacca to the attention of the Chinese court as a potentially great commercial centre in 1403.³²⁴ China sent six missions to Malacca between 1403 and 1413, most of them in large fleets under the grand eunuch Chwang Ho, and the first three rulers of Malacca made five journeys to China between 1411 and 1434.³²⁵ In the seventh year of the Yongle period (1409), Chwang Ho was ordered to bestow 'two silver seals, a hat, a girdle and a robe' upon the Malacca ruler, and a stone tablet proclaimed 'Man-la-chia' to have city status.³²⁶ Malacca soon had a major share in the tributary trade between Southeast Asia and China, and its allegiance to China over time only became stronger.³²⁷ But when, by 1435, the Ming

³²¹ Mills, *Ma Huan*, p. 109, note.

³²² Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, p. 253 and see pp. 230–55; Sopher, *Sea Nomads*, pp. 316–17; Wang Gungwu, 'The first three rulers of Malacca', in: *Community and Nation: Essays on Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Singapore, 1981), pp. 97–107.

³²³ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, p. 253.

³²⁴ Wang Gungwu, 'The opening of relations between China and Malacca 1403–1405', in: *Community and Nation: Essays on Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Singapore, 1981), p. 91; idem, 'The first three rulers of Malacca.'

³²⁵ Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 206.

³²⁶ Mills, *Ma Huan*, p. 108.

³²⁷ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, pp. 242–53.

emperors withdrew from the Indian Ocean, Malacca had secured its position as a maritime power and no longer needed their support.³²⁸ Malacca's obedience to China continued to be proclaimed but from then on ceased to have any serious political implications for either side. Meanwhile, trade with China increased considerably throughout the fifteenth century, especially after 1457, when the ban on private trade was less rigidly enforced.³²⁹

With its independence increasing and its population growing, Malacca constantly upgraded its port facilities and attracted wealthy Muslim traders from Pase.³³⁰

'The merchants and sea-traders realised how much difference there was in sailing to Malacca [instead of Pase], because they could anchor safely there in all weathers, and could buy from the others when it was convenient.'³³¹

More and more 'mollahs and priests learned in the sect of Mohammed' started pouring into Malacca from Pase.³³² These were 'chiefly Arabs, who are esteemed in these parts for their knowledge of the said sect.'³³³ Malacca's ruler, in all likelihood, converted around 1413, thereby positioning himself to marry into the Pase royal family. As a consequence, the septagenarian Sultan Muhammad Iskandar Shah (1414–23) lived in matrimony with the king of Pase's daughter for eight years, 'surrounded by mollahs.'³³⁴ He apparently converted the entire court.

In their turn, Muhammad Iskandar Shah's successors insisted on conversion when passing off their daughters to tributary rulers in the Strait, eastern Sumatra and the Malay peninsula, on which they successfully asserted claims of suzerainty.³³⁵ It was a general custom in Malacca that Muslim women could marry 'heathens' and thus have

³²⁸ Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, p. 206.

³²⁹ A. Reid, 'The Rise and Fall of Sino-Javanese Shipping', in: V. J. H. Houben, H. M. J. Maier and W. van der Molen (eds), *Looking in Odd Mirrors: The Java Sea* (Leiden, 1992), pp. 179, 194–5.

³³⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental, II*, pp. 243, 246. The size of the population of Malacca in the fifteenth century is not known. The *Sejarah Melayu* gives 90,000 and 190,000 (Brown, *Sejarah Melayu*, p. xii).

³³¹ Pires, *Suma Oriental, II*, p. 246.

³³² *Ibid.*, p. 240.

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 241–5, 251.

them convert.³³⁶ The reverse was also common. One Malaccan sultan took all the beautiful daughters of the Parsi and Kalinga merchants whom he wanted as concubines, turned them into Muslims, and then married them off to the sons of his mandarins.³³⁷ There always remained in Malacca an unconverted population of merchants from China, the Coromandel and elsewhere—most of them sojourners—but by 1433 Ma Huan reported that ‘the king of the country and the people of the country all follow the Muslim religion, fasting, doing penance, and chanting liturgies.’³³⁸ Already then, the Malaccan sultans were making sustained attempts to quicken the conversion of the coastal elites of northern Java by sending religious emissaries, while drawing them more and more into their commercial orbit at the same time.³³⁹

Islamization and commercial growth went hand in hand with the expansion of Malacca’s tributary relations in its own immediate neighbourhood. Such tributary relations were of vital importance to Malacca as a means to obtain not only valuable commercial products but also manpower for its growing naval force. With a mere 1150 farms in its core area, and with wild forests (themselves a source of elephants) beginning almost immediately beyond the coast, the city-state at an early stage incorporated a string of small towns and hamlets on the adjacent shore which produced foodstuffs and whose inhabitants would peddle up to Malacca’s harbour for, say, some rice and chicken deliveries.³⁴⁰ There were no settlements here that were even remotely as large as Malacca itself. If Malacca’s population became as large as 100,000 (an estimate that may be on the high side), Muar, the chief place after Malacca, had no more than 2,000 inhabitants.³⁴¹ But beyond these towns, already the early rulers of

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 243, 268.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

³³⁸ Mills, *Ma Huan*, p. 110; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, pp. 268, 273, 254, 265; Duarte Barbosa, II, pp. 176–7. Many Chinese in Malacca appear to have been assimilated within the local Muslim population (L. F. Thomaz, ‘Melaka et ses communautés marchandes au tournant du 16^e siècle’, in: D. Lombard and J. Aubin, *Marchands et hommes d'affaires asiatiques dans l'Océan Indien et la Mer de Chine, 13^e–20^e siècles* (Paris, 1988), p. 39).

³³⁹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, p. 245.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.* For population estimates of Malacca, see Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 69.

Malacca were accepted as overlords by several kingdoms of the Malay peninsula and the islands of the southern Strait. Pahang, which held Trengganu as tributary, was one of these kingdoms with which Malacca had to go to war to obtain control of the Singapore channel and Bintang island.³⁴² Its kings paid a tribute, which was gradually raised, and around the middle of the fifteenth century converted to Islam while marrying a sister of Muzaffar Shah of Malacca.³⁴³ For Malacca it remained an important source of alum, sulphur, gold and fighting men.³⁴⁴ Other kingdoms of the Malay peninsula that became tributary to Malacca were Kedah and Selangor, both important for their tin deliveries.³⁴⁵ As is reflected in the *Sejarah Melayu*, in the course of the fifteenth century Malacca also established territorial claims over the *Riau Daratan*, comprising the watersheds of the four important river systems of eastern Sumatra, those of the Rokan, Kampar, Siak and the Indragiri, with the island of Siantan.³⁴⁶ The latter three rivers gave access to the Minangkabau highlands, whose gold supplies (exchanged against Indian cloth) became an important factor in Malacca's commercial success.³⁴⁷ Other forest and ocean products found in the upper reaches of these rivers, such as the aloeswood of Kampar, or the bezoar stones (found in the stomach of wild pigs and other animals) of Siak, could be as valuable as precious metals.³⁴⁸ The Orang Laut of these places also brought in maritime resources and raided the coasts for slaves. Pires' later account shows that in the *Riau Daratan* military campaigns were conducted with a certain regularity, and that after the middle of the fifteenth century the kings of Kampar and Indragiri 'and the people nearest to them' converted to Islam, while receiving two daughters of the Malaccan king's brother in marriage, and that subsequently the king of Minangkabau also became a Muslim and married the sister of Mansur Shah.³⁴⁹ The conversion and tributary subjection of these three kings appear to have gained the Malaccan ruler Muzaffar Shah

³⁴² Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, pp. 244–5, 263.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 244–5, 248–9, 252–3, 263.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 243–4, 248.

³⁴⁶ B. W. Andaya, 'Recreating a Vision: Daratan and Kepulauan in Historical Context', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land en Volkenkunde*, 153, 4 (1997), pp. 483–508.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 486.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; and see Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, p. 262.

³⁴⁹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, pp. 244–5, 248–9.

high praise from the rulers of Aden, Hormuz, Cambay, and Bengal, who all sent him congratulatory messages, and bestowed on him the title of 'Sultan' (which was to replace 'Raja'), and 'sent many merchants from their regions to live in Malacca.'³⁵⁰

The Riau Daratan, together with the numerous islands of the Riau-Lingga archipelago (or Riau Kepulauan), provided the essential naval strength. The tribute of Rokan consisted entirely of military levies, as did that of Rupert, while Purjim provided rowers, and Tongkal helped Malacca with gold and 'good men' for naval service both.³⁵¹ The warlike Orang Laut (including the Suku Galang pirates) of the four large islands of the Riau-Lingga archipelago, and particularly Bintang, became the most important source of naval fighters and rowers to serve, without pay, under the admiral ('Lasemana') of Malacca when called upon.³⁵² In this archipelago, however, which stretches between the Strait of Malacca across the South China Sea to Kalimantan, we reach the limits of Malacca's dominion.³⁵³ The three hundred islands which were collectively known as the Pulau Tujuh were still part of 'Melaka Kepulauan' but lacked the personal ties with the city-state that the other islands had.³⁵⁴ Still, Pulau Tioman developed into an important stapling and exchange port for the trade with China.³⁵⁵ And the increased cooperation of the Orang Laut scattered across Pulau Tujuh was beginning to allow greater use of these seas, which were notorious for their hidden reefs, through the Anambas and Natuna islands.³⁵⁶ Some of these islands also began to yield good hardwoods for shipbuilding.

Malacca, thus, exported from its tributary dominions a broad range of forest and maritime products, a great deal of tin, and gold, while importing for its own use slaves, and rice and other foodstuffs, including meat, from places as far away as Java.³⁵⁷ The city was at the centre of a regional network in which commercial transactions were conducted in weights of gold and silver, or in Pase's gold cur-

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 262-4.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 250, 264; Chou, 'Contesting the Tenure of Territoriality.'

³⁵³ Andaya, 'Recreating a Vision', p. 483.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 485.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 487.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 487.

³⁵⁷ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, p. 260; Mills, *Ma Huan*, p. 111; Duarte Barbosa, II, pp. 174, 178.

rency, in ashrafis from Cambay and Hormuz, and in tin coins if they were very small.³⁵⁸ But, even more important than Malacca's role as a regional trading centre for domestic products was its role as an Indian Ocean entrepôt serving the exchange of a virtually infinite number of non-domestic products. In the latter half of the fifteenth century, Indian and Chinese merchants would trade in Malacca rather than in Java, Sumatra, or the Maluku islands.³⁵⁹ In Malacca could be found arms, glassware, copper, woollen cloths, and quicksilver from Venice, opium, silver and rosewater from West Asia, cotton and silk textiles from Cambay and the Coromandel, camphor, spices and pepper from Indonesia, porcelain from China, and thousands of other items valuable enough to be traded over long distances.³⁶⁰ According to Pires, in the port of Malacca 'very often eighty-four languages have been found spoken...'³⁶¹ There were thousands of Muslim traders ('Moors') from every part of the Indian Ocean, Parsis, Gujaratis and Chettis, as well as Chinese, and local Malay Muslims as well.³⁶² It is for this reason that by the early sixteenth century Barbosa could write that 'this city of Malacca is the richest seaport with the greatest number of wholesale merchants and abundance of shipping and trade that can be found in the whole world.'³⁶³

The Javanese state of Majapahit ('bitter fruit'), established with Mongol support in the Brantas valley in the last decade of the thirteenth century, was both an agrarian and a maritime realm.³⁶⁴ Its association with the Javanese wet-rice tradition was critical to its legitimacy, as was evident in the annual Caitra festival which was held at Bubad, Majapahit's river port, in March or April, soon after the monsoon had begun to blow from the west, bringing the overseas traders.³⁶⁵ Majapahit comprised 'the core lands of Java in the coun-

³⁵⁸ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, pp. 243, 249–50, 274–6.

³⁵⁹ Cf. Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 208.

³⁶⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, pp. 269–70, 272; *Duarte Barbosa*, II, pp. 172–6.

³⁶¹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, II, p. 269.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 268, 273, 254–5, 265; *Duarte Barbosa*, II, pp. 176–7.

³⁶³ *Duarte Barbosa*, II, p. 175.

³⁶⁴ See Chapter I, pp. 56–57; for a survey of the history of Majapahit, see Krom, *Hindoe-Javaansche Geschiedenis*, pp. 346–467.

³⁶⁵ Tarling, *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, I, pp. 219–20.

try of Hind' (*mūl chāwa az bilād-i-hind*),³⁶⁶ with the terraced rice fields of the thickly peopled eastern interior of the island constituting the backbone of the economy, and effectively ruling almost half of the island in the fourteenth century.³⁶⁷ The king and lords of Java were 'revered like gods' and presided over a profoundly conservative and hierarchical society, while cultivating an exalted and peerless ideal of nobility within the context of large, self-sustaining and polygamous households which practiced widow burning.³⁶⁸ Agrarian Java, wrote Schrieke, 'cherished no other ideal than to remain as it was, shunning all change.'³⁶⁹ Emphasizing dynastic continuity, the kings of Majapahit saw themselves as the custodians of a religiously sanctioned social order which was based on tributary flows from the periphery to the centre and defined all other movement—outside the control of the territorial state—as subversive.³⁷⁰ The *Nāgarakertāgama*, an epic poem and chronicle composed in 1365 by the Buddhist monk Prapanca for the glorification of the Majapahit kings, provides abundant evidence that Mahayana Buddhism was patronized in conjunction with a variety of indigenous Javanese forms of Shaivism and Vishnuism right from the beginning of the rule of Kertanagara (1268–92), the reuniter of the realm, who thereby situated himself unambiguously within the old tradition of sacral kingship of the 'djaman buda.'³⁷¹ The Majapahit rulers were thus regarded as incarnations of Vishnu or 'Shiva-Buddha.'³⁷² Popular traditions of animism and a deep ritual concern for the dead probably remained of equal if not greater significance in most parts of the realm.³⁷³ But there is

³⁶⁶ J. Von Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte Wassaf's, Persisch herausgegeben und Deutsch übersetzt, I Band* (Vienna, 1856), text, p. 45.

³⁶⁷ Pigeaud, *Java in the Fourteenth Century*, IV, pp. 494, 497; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 175.

³⁶⁸ Cf. Lombard, *Carrefour Javanais*, III, pp. 30–32, 55, 90; Pigeaud, *Java in the Fourteenth Century*, IV, p. 469; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 174–6.

³⁶⁹ B. Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, 2 Volumes (The Hague and Bandung, 1955–7), II, pp. 77–78, 99.

³⁷⁰ Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, II, pp. 7 ff.; Lombard, *Carrefour Javanais*, III, p. 130; Pigeaud, *Java in the Fourteenth Century*, IV, p. 522.

³⁷¹ Pigeaud, *Java in the Fourteenth Century*; K. R. Hall, 'Ritual Networks and Royal Power in Majapahit Java', *Archipel*, 52 (1996), p. 116; idem, 'Personal Status and Ritualized Exchange in Majapahit Java', *Archipel*, 59 (2000), pp. 51–96; Tarling, *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, I, p. 216; Veth, *Java*, IV, p. 83.

³⁷² Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, II, p. 10.

³⁷³ A. Reid, 'The Islamization of Southeast Asia', in: M. A. Bakar, A. Kaur and A. Z. Ghazali (eds), *Historia: Essays in Commemoration of the 25th Anniversary of the Department of History, University of Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur, 1984), p. 16.

also evidence that the distance between court and countryside was becoming smaller from the second half of the fourteenth century onwards.³⁷⁴ A realm-wide temple network was established in which local temples became ritually subordinated to temples administered by royal priests, an innovation that effectively extended the core area of imperial authority.³⁷⁵

The foundations of Majapahit's maritime hegemony in the archipelago were laid by the same king, Kertanagara, who as early as 1275 AD sent a naval expedition to Jambi-Malāyu, the Sumatran port that had also been Shrivijaya's first conquest.³⁷⁶ In 1286 Kertanagara erected a statue of his father in the same place, apparently to underscore a Javanese claim of hegemony over the Strait.³⁷⁷ This new situation then provoked Kublai Khan to intervene, with one thousand warships, after the demise of Kertanagara, bringing the latter's son-in-law to the throne and defeating his local rivals, upon which the new capital of Majapahit was founded in 1292/3.³⁷⁸ It took several decades to secure eastern Java. After that Madura, Bali, and ports to the north and east of Java, as far as the southern Philippines and Irian Jaya, were subordinated in short order.³⁷⁹ Majapahit maintained a naval force, which was based in ports on Java's north coast, and in the second half of the fourteenth century could exercise significant coercive power as far as Palembang and Samudra-Pasai as well as in the islands to the east.³⁸⁰ But the overseas linkages with no less than ninety-eight different places throughout Sumatra, the Malay peninsula, Kalimantan, and eastern Indonesia, appear to have been mostly based on trade and tributary relations.³⁸¹ Majapahit also sent missions to China, and maintained commercial relationships with Champa, Siam, Pegu, Vietnam, and Cambodia as well. Pires could still record a situation which had existed about a century prior to his time, in which Muslims had not yet taken over the maritime trade of Majapahit:

³⁷⁴ Hall, 'Ritual Networks', p. 116.

³⁷⁵ Tarling, *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, I, pp. 224–5.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 218–9.

³⁸¹ Lombard, *Carrefour Javanais*, II, p. 40; Reid, 'Islamization of Southeast Asia', p. 27.

'They say that the island of Java used to rule as far as the Moluccas (Maluco) on the eastern side and [over] a great part of the west; and that it had almost all the island of Sumatra under its dominion and all the islands known to the Javanese, and that it had all this for a long time past until about a hundred years ago . . . they affirm that it navigated to Aden and that its chief trade was in Bonuaquelim [Kalinga], Bengal and Pase . . . [and that] all the navigators were heathens . . .'³⁸²

But, clearly, already in the fourteenth century these overseas relations could not have been maintained without at least some Muslim commercial involvement.³⁸³ Some of the states that Majapahit claimed as tributaries were Muslim, including Aru, Perlak, Samudra-Pasai and others.³⁸⁴ Majapahit probably mobilized Muslim shipping in many ports in order to use it further afield.³⁸⁵ This may explain why there was a short-lived Muslim presence in fourteenth-century Ternate, and in Brunei and Sulu, a century before the beginning of continuous Islamization in these areas.³⁸⁶ Through tribute and trading missions, as well as through matrimonial connections with Muslims, particularly in Champa, Islam gained a foothold even at the court of Majapahit itself.³⁸⁷ At the same time, Chinese navigators, seamen and traders who had migrated to local bases in the archipelago may have blended with the Muslims and Hindu-Javanese traders of the northeast coast of Java, or have been absorbed in the navies that Majapahit put together to dominate the east.³⁸⁸

Change could hardly be averted, of course, and with the dramatic increase of overseas trade in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Majapahit's hegemony in and beyond Java was progressively undermined. The geography and dispersed settlement pattern of Java had always impeded lasting unification beyond the core river plains, and family politics on the part of the rulers had never been an adequate means to keep the noble apanages under close administrative control, while Majapahit's large, unwieldy peasant armies continued to

³⁸² Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 174.

³⁸³ Reid, 'Islamization of Southeast Asia', p. 27.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

³⁸⁸ A. Reid, 'Flows and Seepages in the Long-term Chinese Interaction with Southeast Asia', in: A. Reid (ed.), *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese in Honour of Jennifer Cushman* (Sydney, 1996), p. 21.

be based on soccage and the cavalry remained small.³⁸⁹ If Java was a 'sponge country' for precious metals, its growing commercial prosperity led to an increase of monetization on all levels, giving rise to an increasingly important class of intermediaries—tax-farmers and the like—who could not be accommodated in the old agrarian hierarchy.³⁹⁰ The rise of Malacca and Siam, and the aggressive overseas policies of the Ming first reduced and then destroyed the Hindu-Javanese state's control of its outer possessions.³⁹¹ Already early in the fifteenth century Majapahit had lost its ascendancy in the Indonesian archipelago outside Java, and by 1428 it had lost control over the western part of Java itself.³⁹² By the middle of the fifteenth century the Javanese pasisir had slipped out of Majapahit's hands.³⁹³ Thus, the Hindu-Javanese kraton of the interior had already lost much of its importance before a coalition of coastal states, under the leadership of Demak, in the course of 1513 or 1514 initiated the final phase of the conflict.³⁹⁴ This lasted until 1528, when the kraton was taken and the royal family was forced to flee and take refuge in Bali—the island which had long been a dependency of Majapahit.³⁹⁵

The crucial factor in the decline of Majapahit, clearly, was the relentless rise to power of the pasisir states which in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were turning to Islam one by one and repudiated the control of the agrarian state. The pasisir was by no means completely Islamized in the fifteenth century, particularly not in the west.³⁹⁶ In the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it appears that foreign observers in Java considered the kings of Majapahit and

³⁸⁹ Lombard, *Carrefour Javanais*, III, pp. 30–32, 100; Pigeaud, *Java in the Fourteenth Century*, IV, pp. 469, 497, 522; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 176; Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, II, pp. 68–69.

³⁹⁰ Lombard, *Carrefour Javanais*, III, pp. 32–33; II, pp. 38–39; Pigeaud, *Java in the Fourteenth Century*, IV, pp. 499–500; Tarling, *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, I, p. 225.

³⁹¹ Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, II, p. 69.

³⁹² Tarling, *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, I, p. 227; J. Noorduy, 'Majapahit in the Fifteenth Century', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde*, 134, 2–3 (1978), p. 225.

³⁹³ Noorduy, 'Majapahit', pp. 254–7.

³⁹⁴ Cf. Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, II, p. 68.

³⁹⁵ A. Hobart, U. Ramseyer and A. Leemann, *The People of Bali* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 1996), pp. 27–38.

³⁹⁶ Cf. Chapter I, pp. 57–58.

Pajajaran as the two legitimate rulers of most of the island, the one in the eastern part, the other in the west or what was called Sunda.³⁹⁷ The city of Pakuwan was the royal residence of the rulers of Pajajaran, the counterpart in western Java of Majapahit. Pires, in effect, calls the place 'Dayo,' by the same name which he gave the capital of Majapahit, and which in both cases probably derived from Sundanese *dayeuh*, 'capital.'³⁹⁸ Pakuwan, located near modern Bogor or Buitenzorg, 45 kilometres south of Batavia, was in all likelihood founded as the capital of Pajajaran in 1433/4.³⁹⁹ Pires describes the kingdom of Sunda, which he thought took up a little more than a third of the island, ending at the river Tjimanoeck, as a heathen state of chivalrous, seafaring warriors who practiced widow burning and did not allow Muslims into it, except a few, for fear that they would do what they had done in Java and make themselves masters of the country by their cunning.⁴⁰⁰ Pires dwells on the importance of the 'lord captains' of the Sundanese ports, their aristocratic lifestyle, and explains that they too were all heathen; only in the easternmost port of Sunda, that of Tjimanoeck, he observes 'many Moors,' and this was apparently the only port which belonged to the Sundanese king himself.⁴⁰¹ The most important merchandise of Sunda was rice, some of which was taken as far as Malacca in junks, and to Java.⁴⁰² There was a voluminous trade in numerous other foodstuffs, as well as pepper, fruits, gold, and slaves—the latter from Sunda itself and the Maldivian islands (which could be reached from Sunda in six or seven days).⁴⁰³ There was a total of six ports of varying significance in the Sunda lands which specialized in these items.⁴⁰⁴ Going from west to east, Bantam (or Banten) was the first, a 'good city' on a river, which was probably already important as a pepper port in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and under the Sundanese kings was second in importance, trading with the Maldivian islands and Sumatra on the Panchur side, as well as Malacca.⁴⁰⁵ A second port, of lesser importance,

³⁹⁷ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, p. 117.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*; see also Veth, *Java*, I, pp. 278–9.

³⁹⁹ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, p. 117.

⁴⁰⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 166–8, 173.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 169; see also pp. 170–1.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 170–2.

⁴⁰⁵ *Al-Hind*, II, p. 41; De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, p. 118; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 170.

was Pontang, in the delta of the Pontang river in the easternmost part of the bay of Bantam, with 'a great town.'⁴⁰⁶ Pires identifies a third port, which he calls the 'port of Chegujde,' the location of which is not certain but is most likely to have been on the Chisadane river, which enters the sea by five mouths, with 'a town and a good one.'⁴⁰⁷ A fourth port was 'Tamgara,' which can also not be located with certainty; possibly it was thirteen kilometres inland on the Chisadane, at a place called Tangerang, but it may also have been Tanara, on the Chidurian, or a place called Tangorra, ten kilometres east of Pontang.⁴⁰⁸ The most important trading centre in the western part of the island, in any case, was Sunda Kalapa, at two days journey downstream from Pakuwan, the residence of the Pajajaran kings.⁴⁰⁹ This city had 'a magnificent port . . . where the trade is greatest and whither they sail from Sumatra . . . Malacca, Java and Madura and many other places . . .'⁴¹⁰ Sunda Kalapa was at the mouth of the Chiliwung river, at the site of modern Batavia or Jakarta.⁴¹¹ And, finally, the sixth port of Sunda was 'Tjimanoeck,' at the mouth of the river with the same name, at a day and a night sailing with favourable wind from Sunda Kalapa, a port inaccessible to junks and soon to lose all importance due to silting.⁴¹² If this was the port of the Pajajaran kings in the fifteenth century, it had probably been the former Indramayu or Dermayu, the port of the old Sundanese kingdom of 'Galuh' of which we read repeatedly in the Sundanese legends.⁴¹³

By the early sixteenth century, then, the Tjimanoeck river was the western frontier of Muslim expansion on the island of Java and the beginning of the properly Javanese, as opposed to Sundanese, *pasisir*. It was only later in the sixteenth century that large numbers of Javanese Muslims would move from the *pasisir* districts of Middle Java along the coast to the west and occupy Kapala (which they renamed 'Jakarta' or 'Jaya-karta') and Bantam, thereby cutting the

⁴⁰⁶ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 170.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, and note 2.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 168, 172-3; De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, p. 117.

⁴¹⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 172-3.

⁴¹¹ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, p. 109.

⁴¹² Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 173.

⁴¹³ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, p. 109.

Sundanese off from the sea.⁴¹⁴ Pires explains that the powerful Muslim lords ('patis') who 'have all the trade' of the seacoast were actually not Javanese of long standing but mostly descendants of Chinese, Parsi, Kalinga and other immigrants, who were 'slaves and merchants a couple of days ago' and, being socially insecure, were even more proud and boastful than the Javanese nobility of the hinterland.⁴¹⁵ In the fourth decade of the fifteenth century Ma Huan divided the population of the pasisir trading cities into three groups: the Muslims from many countries, the Chinese, many of whom were also Muslims, and the unconverted Javanese.⁴¹⁶ Not much is known about the conversion of the Javanese elements in the population of these ports.⁴¹⁷ Ma Huan would probably have included these in 'Muslims from many countries.' But how exactly they converted is not clear. There is little reason to suppose that mystic brotherhoods were already active in Java in the fifteenth century.⁴¹⁸ According to Pires, religious teachers only came to Java after Islamic communities had been formed:

'At the time when there were heathens along the sea coast of Java, many merchants used to come, Parsees, Arabs, Gujaratees, Bengalees, Malays and other nationalities, there being many Moors among them. They began to trade in the country and to grow rich. They succeeded in way of [sic] making mosques, and mollahs came from outside, so that they came in such growing numbers that the sons of these said Moors were already Javanese and rich, for they had been in these parts for about seventy years. In some places the heathen Javanese lords themselves turned Mohammedan, and these mollahs and merchant Moors took possession of these places. Others had a way of fortifying the places where they lived, and they killed the Javanese lords and made themselves lords; and in this way they made themselves masters of the sea coast and took over trade and power in Java . . .'⁴¹⁹

In Java, as elsewhere in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, Islam was brought by traders and became a political factor in the rapidly rising urban centres of the pasisir when the scale of trade began to

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴¹⁵ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 182, 199–200; and see M. C. Ricklefs, 'Six Centuries of Islamization in Java', in: N. Levtzion (ed.), *Conversion to Islam* (New York, 1979), pp. 104–5.

⁴¹⁶ Mills, *Ma Huan*, p. 93.

⁴¹⁷ Ricklefs, 'Six Centuries of Islamization', p. 106.

⁴¹⁸ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, p. 29.

⁴¹⁹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 182.

increase in the late fourteenth century.⁴²⁰ Java's ports grew rich in part because the Javanese were involved in the spice trade with the Moluccas and used these ports as transshipment points. They also exported increasing amounts of pepper, and rice and other foodstuffs from their own hinterlands. The demand for spices and pepper had gone up everywhere, culminating in a veritable 'spice-orgy,' particularly in those parts of the world—Europe, the Middle East, China—that were recovering from the ravages of the Black Death.⁴²¹ More than any other major region, China, under the early Ming dynasty, saw its population and wealth expand at the end of the fourteenth century and generated an enormous demand for products of the Nanyang trade, most of all pepper and sappanwood, which now became articles of mass consumption for the first time.⁴²² The Ming dynasty, of course, inherited a long tradition of increasingly close relations with Southeast Asia that had begun with the Southern Sung and reached an early peak under the Mongol Yüan in the 1280s and 90s. The Chinese were trading in Java long before Malacca existed. They introduced new shipbuilding techniques here, and Chinese copper cash, called picis, were used in Java as the base coinage from 1300 AD onwards. But, under the early Ming, there was again a great increase of Chinese activity in all parts of Southeast Asia, both official and unofficial, including the unprecedented expeditions of Chwang Ho in the opening decades of the fifteenth century, and a stepped up reinforcement of the overseas Chinese communities.⁴²³ The Chinese actively participated in the urbanisation of all of Southeast Asia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in the Javanese pasisir only more so. Chinese traders played major roles in the rise of Tuban, Gresik, Surabaya, and Demak.⁴²⁴ And,

⁴²⁰ Reid, 'Islamization of Southeast Asia', pp. 20, 23; idem, *Age of Commerce, II*, pp. 12–15.

⁴²¹ C. H. H. Wake, 'The Changing Pattern of Europe's Pepper and Spice Imports, ca 1400–1700', *Journal of European Economic History*, 8 (1979), pp. 361–403; Reid, 'Islamization of Southeast Asia', pp. 20, 23; idem, *Age of Commerce, II*, pp. 12–15.

⁴²² Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, p. 12.

⁴²³ Wang Gungwu, 'China and Southeast Asia 1402–1424', in: *Community and Nation: Essays on Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Singapore, 1981), pp. 58–80; J. V. Mills, 'Chinese Navigators in Insulinde about A.D. 1500', *Archipel*, 18 (1979), pp. 69–93; Wang Gungwu, *The Chinese Overseas: From Earthbound China to the Quest for Autonomy* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), esp. pp. 17–24; Reid, 'Flows and Seepages', pp. 17–37.

⁴²⁴ Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, p. 207; Lombard, *Carrefour Javanais, II*, pp. 41–45.

in spite of Chinese bans on private trade, shipping across the Ryukyu island kingdom and the South China Sea continued to grow throughout the fifteenth century, and tribute voyages were at their peak.⁴²⁵ Javanese traditions reflect the infusion of Chinese blood, wealth and technology into the ruling Muslim dynasties of the pasisir.⁴²⁶ The Chinese network was much more significant in Java in the fifteenth century than in Sumatra, and since most of the Chinese of Java converted to Islam the controversial claim was advanced that Islam was brought to Java by them.⁴²⁷ In the second half of the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth century, however, with the direct contact between China and Southeast Asia much reduced, the overseas Chinese assimilated more and more within the cosmopolitan populations of the port cities, and often ceased to be regarded as Chinese at all.⁴²⁸

In the Javanese pasisir, then, immediately to the east of Sunda, the first port city dominated by Muslims was Cirebon, a settlement with up to a thousand inhabitants which was still 'heathen' forty years before Pires wrote, up a river which allowed junks to enter it, and with a ruler who was subject to the lord of Demak.⁴²⁹ The founder of the earliest Muslim settlement in Cirebon had been a Chinese merchant who was sent from Demak at some time in the fifteenth century before the latter city finally turned to Islam.⁴³⁰ Demak's early expansionist drive to the west may have aimed at increased control of the rich rice harvests that could be obtained for Demak's trade in the fertile alluvial coasts between Kendal and Cirebon.⁴³¹ The original inhabitants of Cirebon, as the name of the city indicates, were probably Sundanese.⁴³² And, in effect, it appears

⁴²⁵ Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 15.

⁴²⁶ Reid, 'Flows and Seepages', p. 25.

⁴²⁷ D. Lombard and C. Salmon, 'Islam et sinité', *Archipel*, 30 (1985), pp. 73-94; A. L. Kumar, 'Islam, the Chinese, and Indonesian Historiography—A Review Article', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 46, 3 (August, 1987), pp. 603-16; Chen Dasheng, *Islamic Inscriptions in Quanzhou (Zaitun)* (Yinchuan, 1984); H. J. De Graaf and Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, *Chinese Muslims in Java in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, ed. by M. C. Ricklefs (Melbourne, 1984); A. Reid, 'Review of De Graaf and Pigeaud, Chinese Muslims', *American Historical Review*, 94, 2 (1989), pp. 508-9.

⁴²⁸ Reid, 'Flows and Seepages', pp. 31, 36-37.

⁴²⁹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 183.

⁴³⁰ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, pp. 109-10.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

⁴³² *Ibid.*

likely that the land of Cirebon (together with some areas to the east of it) had been under the suzerainty of the Hindu-Sundanese kings of Galuh and Pajajaran.⁴³³

There were three more ports between Cirebon and Demak which were of some importance at the end of the fifteenth century and appear to have obeyed the lord of Demak.⁴³⁴ First 'Japura,' a country with two thousand inhabitants living in villages, which had a port on a river—probably the Chisangarung, which debouches at Tanjong Losari.⁴³⁵ The land of Tegal, with about four thousand inhabitants living in villages, had a port with about fifteen hundred inhabitants on a river, 'where they load quantities of rice and other foodstuffs.'⁴³⁶ And there was Semarang, of about three thousand inhabitants, with a port, 'not a very good one,' and of diminished importance.⁴³⁷

Demak, according to Pires, was a city on a rich river which junks entered at full tide, of about eight or ten thousand inhabitants, and larger than any of the other ports of Java and Sunda.⁴³⁸ Demak was favourably situated for both trade and agriculture, lying on the bank of a sea arm which separated the Muria mountains from Java.⁴³⁹ In the fifteenth century this waterway was rather broad and well navigated, with sailing vessels traveling through it from Semarang to Rembang, a situation which was changing by the seventeenth century, when this passage became increasingly difficult to use due to sedimentation.⁴⁴⁰ In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Demak was the stapling place for the trade in rice from the districts on both sides of the shallow sea arm with its tranquil water.⁴⁴¹ Juwana, in the east, was probably an important centre of rice production around 1500.⁴⁴² And the rulers of Demak could augment the rice supplies which they needed for their own use and for trade from the Middle-Javanese districts of Pengging and Pajang once they controlled the

⁴³³ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁴ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 183–4; and cf. De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, p. 110.

⁴³⁵ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 183–4.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 186.

⁴³⁹ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, p. 34.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*

Serang river which entered the sea between Demak and Japara.⁴⁴³ This river remained navigable until far into the eighteenth century for smaller vessels, at least up to Godong. Pengging and Pajang are to the south of the mountains where the Serang river has her sources and were connected by roads that ran across the low watershed from the valley of the Serang and the Lusi to the valley of the Solo river, the latter being the connecting link between Middle-South and East Java.⁴⁴⁴ Tapping into these areas, Demak exported large amounts of rice to Malacca.⁴⁴⁵ When Malacca grew to pre-eminence in the fifteenth century, Demak became the residence of the chief pati of coastal Java, who could collect forty junks from his lands and tens of thousands of fighting men and who was closely related to the lords of Java through matrimonial ties.⁴⁴⁶ Already then he was powerful enough to subjugate Palembang and Jambi, as well as other islands. Pires reports that the ruler's grandfather had been a slave from Gresik, the oldest centre in east Java to have a Muslim ruler.⁴⁴⁷ According to a Mataramese tradition the first Muslim sovereign of Demak, Raden Patah, was a son of the last king of Majapahit, referred to as Bra Wijaya in legends.⁴⁴⁸ Raden Patah's mother would, according to the same tradition, have been a Chinese princess in the royal zenana of Majapahit.⁴⁴⁹ Most likely he was a Chinese Muslim trader.⁴⁵⁰ The existence of the tradition, however, shows that, at some level, continuity in dynastic history between Majapahit and Demak was considered important.⁴⁵¹ Whatever his exact origin, Raden Patah founded Demak, where he ruled from 1477 to 1519. His warlike successor, Trenggana assumed the title of Sultan about 1524 with authorization from Mecca, destroying the remnants of Majapahit four years later.⁴⁵² According to a Portuguese observer who visited Java in the 1540s 'his aim is to Islamicise all the surrounding peoples,

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 185–6.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 184–6.

⁴⁴⁷ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, pp. 37–38.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁰ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Chinese Muslims in Java*.

⁴⁵¹ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, p. 37; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 185, note 1.

⁴⁵² De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, pp. 50–51.

so that he himself will become another Sultan of Turkey beside whom [Portuguese] Melaka is nothing.⁴⁵³

There were two other ports in the immediate vicinity of Demak: Tadana and Japara.⁴⁵⁴ Tadana, or in Pires' version Tidunan, belonged to a district of two to three thousand men, a few kilometres up the river Serang. Japara was situated at the foot of the high mountain of the island of Murya, at the western end of the old sea arm, and had a beautiful port, favourably situated for large ships and protected by three small islands, which was probably older than Demak itself but had risen from insignificance only in the second half of the fifteenth century.⁴⁵⁵ Japara soon became the largest naval power of the Java Sea, but fell under Demak, which had more people and more land.⁴⁵⁶ En route to the Moluccas, it was 'the key to all Java.'⁴⁵⁷

Juwana was a port at the eastern end of the sea arm which used to separate the Murya mountains from Java, with a more inland royal residence at Pati, but apparently losing out in the trade rivalry with Japara-Demak.⁴⁵⁸ Further to the east was the land of Rembang, which apparently served as a port, with about four thousand men working the land, and, like all pasisir lands 'at war with the people of the hinterland.'⁴⁵⁹ Nothing else is mentioned on the coast to the east of Rembang until we reach Tuban. This was an old city. It appears that men from Tuban, possibly fishermen in origin, preyed on merchant ships on their way to Gresik and Surabaya.⁴⁶⁰ Already in the eleventh century Chinese authors refer to Tuban as a port, and the Mongol-Chinese naval force that came to Java in 1292 went on shore at Tuban, using it as a springboard.⁴⁶¹ A Chinese account of 1416 also refers to it as an important trading city, with more than a thousand households, amongst which a large Chinese community.⁴⁶² By the early sixteenth century the town, on a plain, was surrounded by a brick wall, and had about a thousand inhabitants,

⁴⁵³ Mendez Pinto, quoted in Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, p. 175.

⁴⁵⁴ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 186-9.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 187; De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, pp. 34, 102.

⁴⁵⁶ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 188-9; Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, p. 174.

⁴⁵⁷ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 187-9.

⁴⁵⁸ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, pp. 86-87.

⁴⁵⁹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 189.

⁴⁶⁰ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, pp. 130-1.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² Veth, *Java*, I, p. 62.

some with bricked enclosures as well, and still a special quarter for 'heathens.'⁴⁶³ The surrounding lands of Tuban were well populated, and were able to produce a fighting force of six or seven thousand men.⁴⁶⁴ It produced and exported rice, pepper, cattle, meat, and dried fish.⁴⁶⁵ Its port, apparently at some distance from the town, was also a gateway to the rice lands in the lower basins of the Solo and the Brantas, to which it was connected by a good road of no more than twenty kilometres, running through the coastal mountains to Bubat.⁴⁶⁶ While Tuban was the nearest port to the Majapahit capital, the royal family, although Muslim (probably since the middle of the fifteenth century), was subject and related to the 'Cafre,' who backed it up against its own Muslim rivals on the coast with a force of ten or twenty thousand men.⁴⁶⁷ The Pati of Tuban was of Javanese origin and a third-generation Muslim who, to Pires, did not seem to be 'a very firm believer in Muhammad.'⁴⁶⁸ Among the Tuban nobility titles were used which were reminiscent of titles in Majapahit.⁴⁶⁹

Immediately to the east of Tuban was the land of Sidayu, not a trading country, but with a town surrounded by a wall, with few inhabitants, a coast bad for landing, and largely 'heathen.'⁴⁷⁰ Shielded in the Strait of Madura, and with its fertile hinterland in the delta of the Solo river, however, there was Gresik, 'the great trading port, the best in all Java, whither the Gujaratees, and [people of] Calicut, Bengalees, Siamese, Chinese, and people of Liu-Kiu [Formosa] used to sail of old.'⁴⁷¹

Gresik and its surrounding lands had reached a population of about six or seven thousand men by the early sixteenth century and was ruled by a Muslim with origins in the trading world of Malacca.⁴⁷² Like all coastal rulers of Java, he had many rowing vessels which were fit for raiding but could not leave the shelter of the land.⁴⁷³

⁴⁶³ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 190, 192.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-2; De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, pp. 130-1.

⁴⁶⁶ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁷ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 190.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁴⁶⁹ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, pp. 132-3.

⁴⁷⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 192.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 192-3.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

Gresik, 'the jewel of Java in trading ports,'⁴⁷⁴ was not old. According to Chinese accounts the port was founded in the second half of the fourteenth century on a deserted beach, and its first inhabitants would presumably have been Chinese navigators and traders.⁴⁷⁵ In 1387 Gresik is mentioned as a port belonging to the realm of Majapahit, and there are indications that there were maritime connections between Gresik and Blambangan and interim ports already then.⁴⁷⁶ In 1411 a Chinese notable of Gresik allegedly sent a tributary mission to China. And the town does not really seem to have flourished prior to the fifteenth century.

The port of Surabaya is mentioned in fourteenth-century Javanese writings, such as the *Nāgarakertāgama*, from which it appears that it was the capital of Janggala, the core lands of the delta of the Brantas which had been the domain of important royal families since the eleventh century.⁴⁷⁷ It was at the mouth of the Kali Mas, the northernmost branch of the delta. The first Muslim communities were probably founded in Surabaya in the middle of the fifteenth century.⁴⁷⁸ In Pires' time its importance as a trading town was less than that of Gresik.⁴⁷⁹ Its Muslim ruler was closely related to other Muslim ruling families of the coast, and he was sometimes allied with but also at war with Majapahit. More frequently, with his six or seven thousand fighting men in small ships, the Muslim ruler of Surabaya, was engaged in raiding the warlike Hindu kings of Blambangan who dominated the eastern corner of Java as vassals of Majapahit, a country that was a major producer of male and female slaves and that still commonly practiced widow burning, and whose economy was entirely agrarian, without overseas trade.⁴⁸⁰ About thirty-six kilometres to the south of Surabaya there was only the 'land of Gamda'—this was possibly at the mouth at the Kali Brantas, the southernmost branch of the same delta.⁴⁸¹ It was a densely populated and rich agricultural area but not a trading country either, with a Hindu king,

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁴⁷⁵ De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, pp. 137–9.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 156–7.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 196–7.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 196, 198; De Graaf and Pigeaud, *Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen*, pp. 157–9, 192–5.

⁴⁸¹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 196.

a son of the Majapahit ruling house, and the easternmost place which had been reached, in the early sixteenth century, by the 'Orang Slam'.⁴⁸² 'From here onwards,' writes Pires, 'there are no Moors except in the Moluccas, and those of Banda.'⁴⁸³

That observation was not quite exact, but the influence of Majapahit on the Lesser Sunda Islands was apparently not significant, nor was the influence of the Muslim traders of the Javanese *pasisir*. Lombok, Sumbawa, Bima, Flores, Timor, and other islands to the east of Bali are described by Pires mainly as sources of slaves, horses, sulphur, sandalwood, and some foodstuffs which were brought to Java and sometimes to Malacca, but which remained the domains of 'heathen' kings and 'robbers'.⁴⁸⁴ Bima was a port of call on the route to the Moluccas.⁴⁸⁵ The mountainous and populous island of Sangeang had a 'fair for robbers' and was another source of slaves.⁴⁸⁶ Timor, an island that had been known to the Chinese for some centuries (under the name of To-men) may have been inhabited by some Muslims who were there to obtain sandalwood which was highly valued in Malabar, the Coromandel and Cambay.⁴⁸⁷

Majapahit clearly had more impact on the island of Kalimantan in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, even though that too was off the main shipping routes.⁴⁸⁸ An 'Indianized' kingdom, named Negaradipa, appears to have existed in the hinterland of present-day Banjarmasin in the mid-fourteenth century and had become a satellite of Majapahit.⁴⁸⁹ At Amuntai have been found the remains of brick buildings dating from the fourteenth century, and local traditions, especially the Hikayat Banjar, mention relations with Java at this time.⁴⁹⁰ Immigration from Java led to relatively dense population patterns in the basin of the Negara and brought irrigated rice cultivation, and the products of the Banjar region—wood, rice and

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 197; Veth, *Java*, IV, p. 89.

⁴⁸³ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 197.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 200–205.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁷ Duarte Barbosa, II, pp. 195–6, and note 3.

⁴⁸⁸ Cf. Chapter I, pp. 58–59; Lombard, *Carrefour Javanais*, I, p. 15; King, *Peoples of Borneo*, pp. 33, 107.

⁴⁸⁹ King, *Peoples of Borneo*, p. 109.

⁴⁹⁰ Lombard, *Carrefour Javanais*, I, p. 15.

diamonds of Martapura—were exported to Java's northcoast.⁴⁹¹ The Banjar language which was developing at this time is a variant of Malay replete with Javanisms. And the settlement of Javanese Muslims in many parts of Kalimantan dates back to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as well.⁴⁹² Many of these Muslims later merged with the Malay population of Kalimantan, which was mostly made up of indigenous converts and immigrants from other parts of the archipelago, and lived by trade, fishing and some swamp rice cultivation on the coasts, along the main rivers, and in the main ports.⁴⁹³ Except in the Banjar region, Kalimantan never produced agricultural surpluses, but it did export a whole range of forest products, from camphor, wax and honey to birds' nests, in addition to alluvial gold, which entered the overseas trading channels as luxury products.⁴⁹⁴ Brunei, in the north of the island, was a port that distinguished itself in the eyes of the Yongle emperor—not by its strategic location but by being the first to send a tribute mission headed by its own ruler in 1408.⁴⁹⁵ Chinese support was a major factor in its rise in the early fifteenth century. Goods for the China market were exchanged on the route from Manila to Brunei and Malacca.⁴⁹⁶ The Bruneians went to Luzon to buy gold. The Luzons and 'Burneos' became so closely related that the Portuguese regarded them as 'almost one people.'⁴⁹⁷ The Brunei rulers were the first to convert to Islam, possibly already in the fifteenth century, but certainly no later than the early sixteenth century.⁴⁹⁸

The accessibility of the large island of Sulawesi, even more than Kalimantan, was limited because rocks and corals line its coasts almost without interruption.⁴⁹⁹ This explains, to an extent at least, why there is little evidence of Indianization on the island, and why it became Islamized at a relatively later date than other large islands in the archipelago. Trade nevertheless was important for South Sulawesi, the home of the Bugis and Makassarese.⁵⁰⁰ From the eleventh

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹² King, *Peoples of Borneo*, p. 33.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 31–33.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 105–6; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 132–3.

⁴⁹⁵ Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 206.

⁴⁹⁶ Reid, 'Sojourners and Settlers', p. 34.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴⁹⁸ King, *Peoples of Borneo*, p. 122.

⁴⁹⁹ Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, p. 253; and see Chapter I, pp. 61–62.

⁵⁰⁰ Pelras, *Bugis*, p. 4.

to the thirteenth century the trade in local mineral and vegetable products brought increased prosperity to South Sulawesi.⁵⁰¹ Via Shrivijaya and later Malayu, and via the southern Philippines, trade goods started to arrive from India and China respectively.⁵⁰² If the major kingdoms which are named in the Buginese epic *La Galigo* actually existed in the thirteenth century, it can be speculated that their economic pre-eminence was shattered by the changing political and economic situation in the wider archipelago, particularly those associated with the rise of Majapahit, from the last quarter of the thirteenth century on. In the early fourteenth century, Malayu apparently continued to trade with South Sulawesi, and with the Moluccas through the Selayar and Buton straits, but during the reign of King Hayam Wuruk (1328–89) of Majapahit all trade from the Moluccas and Sulawesi was intercepted by the Javanese, who were especially interested in Sulawesi iron.⁵⁰³ Majapahit extended its authority over parts of Sulawesi, including Luwu', Selayar, Buton, and Banggai.⁵⁰⁴ In large part as a consequence of the growing control of Majapahit, the Chinese spice trade was diverted from the Sulawesi Sea to the Java routes.⁵⁰⁵ These developments are likely to have had significant consequences for the kingdoms of South Sulawesi, although their exact nature is unclear, especially since they coincided with major environmental change in the coastal areas, including the silting-up of waterways and the desiccation of large tracts of land.⁵⁰⁶ In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in any case, numerous migrations appear to have occurred, and new agricultural domains were opened up in the coastal regions of South Sulawesi on an extensive scale.⁵⁰⁷ By the fifteenth century its economy of rare exports had been greatly expanded and transformed into an agricultural one with vastly different political underpinnings. Trade connections were established with Malacca in the fifteenth century, but by then these were no longer the sole source of prosperity of the ruling elite.⁵⁰⁸ The effects of the expansion of trade were probably most pronounced on

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 107–12.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

the western coast, where the Malay settlements were located. However, throughout the fifteenth century the South Sulawesi exports were carried in Malay and Javanese ships, while Bugi and Makassarese navigation remained insignificant.⁵⁰⁹ The area did not begin to develop a strong Islamic identity until the seventeenth century.⁵¹⁰

In the Sulu archipelago, by contrast, a major commercial centre arose in Jolo as early as the thirteenth century, with important links to China, the central and northern Philippines, Kalimantan and the western Malay world.⁵¹¹ It is likely that Chinese Muslims were instrumental in spreading Islam in these islands already then, to be followed by others from Sumatra, Malacca, and elsewhere, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The small volcanic islands of Sulu produced or channeled trepang, edible birds' nests, pearls and mother of pearl shell, tortoise shell, and forest products such as camphor, wax and gum; these were exchanged for fine fabrics, gold and pottery from China.⁵¹² In origin, and throughout its history, Sulu was an emporium not only of regular traders from various surrounding areas, but also a major centre for piratical marauders and slave-raiders.⁵¹³ Due to the influx of slaves, the composition of the population of Sulu became extremely heterogeneous, for there was not an island in the Philippines that was not visited by these marauders.⁵¹⁴ The Tausig landed and commercial elite which came to be known as 'the people of Jolo' have been traced to a thirteenth-century bilingual trading community of Sama-speaking men and of women of the Visayas (in the Central Philippines).⁵¹⁵ These are also the people who are credited with the establishment of the Sultanate of Jolo in about the middle of the fifteenth century. By adopting Islam and laying claim to a greater Islamic purity the Tausig rulers formalized their dominance over the other Sama-speaking peoples of the Sulu archipelago.⁵¹⁶ But Sulu was never more than a loosely integrated state, based

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵¹¹ Cf. Chapter III, p. 107; Saleeby, *History of Sulu*; Kiefer, 'Tausig Polity', p. 21; Sather, 'Sea and Shore People', p. 5; Sather, 'Sea Nomads', p. 245.

⁵¹² A. Kemp Pallesen, *Culture Contact and Language Convergence* (Manila, 1985), p. 247.

⁵¹³ Saleeby, *History of Sulu*, p. 49.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ Kemp Pallesen, *Culture Contact*, pp. 246–64.

⁵¹⁶ Sather, 'Sea and Shore People', p. 5; Sather, 'Sea Nomads', p. 246; Kiefer, 'Tausig Polity', p. 23.

primarily on a personal alliance network and a system of ethnic stratification, with weakly developed corporate institutions.⁵¹⁷

Further to the east and south, the Molucca and Banda islands attracted Javanese and Malay traders who introduced Islam and notions of Islamic statehood in the second half of the fifteenth century, shortly after the spice trade had started to grow very significantly in importance.⁵¹⁸ These were the *Juzur al-ʿAqāqir* or 'Spice Islands' of the Arab navigators, who knew them—mostly from hearsay—for their horticultural uniqueness and for their remote location in a ring of active volcanoes whose periodic eruptions enriched the spice gardens with nutrient-laden dust.⁵¹⁹ The five small Moluccan islands of Ternate, Tidore, Motir, Makian, and Bacan, about 600 kilometres north of Banda, were the unique source of cloves by the late fifteenth century.⁵²⁰ The volcanic islands of 'Maluku' rose almost vertically out of the water, being the peaks of very high mountains just off the coast of the larger island of Halmahera or 'Gillolo,' itself only a site of cloves which were still wild, and entirely 'heathen' apart from its Muslim king.⁵²¹ The most prominent of the five islands was Ternate which had a population of up to 2,000, in addition to a number of foreign merchants, and the only king in the Moluccas which was entitled Sultan.⁵²² Ternate was at war with its twin island Tidore, ruled by the Ternate Sultan's father-in-law, who was also a Muslim and who, with a subject population of about the same size, was reckoned to be as powerful.⁵²³ Half of the 'heathen' island of Motir, with 600 inhabitants, was also subject to this king; and both Tidore and Motir brought their cloves in prahus to Makian, an island with about 3,000 inhabitants, to be sold in a port where larger ships could anchor.⁵²⁴ Makian also had a Muslim ruler, a first cousin

⁵¹⁷ Sather, 'Sea and Shore People', p. 4.

⁵¹⁸ L. Y. Andaya, *The World of Maluku: Eastern Indonesia in the Early Modern World* (Honolulu, 1993), pp. 1–2, 5; Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, pp. 4–6; Reid, 'Sojourners and Settlers', pp. 20–21.

⁵¹⁹ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 220, 499; Ch. Corn, *The Scents of Eden: A History of the Spice Trade* (New York, 1998), p. xvii; Duarte Barbosa, *II*, pp. 196–8.

⁵²⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental, I*, p. 213; Duarte Barbosa, *II*, pp. 199–204; Corn, *Scents of Eden*, p. xviii; Reid, *Age of Commerce, II*, pp. 3–4.

⁵²¹ Andaya, *Maluku*, p. 7; Corn, *Scents of Eden*, pp. 29–30; Pires, *Suma Oriental, I*, pp. 213, 221.

⁵²² Pires, *Suma Oriental, I*, pp. 214, 217.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 214–5, 217.

of the king of Tidore, as had the island of Bacan, the most densely populated of the Moluccas, whose ruler was a half-brother of the king of Ternate.⁵²⁵ The large island of Seram, with its main port at Gule Gule at the eastern tip, was still wild and forested, inhabited by a near-naked population of warrior-cannibals, and almost touched the Moluccas but was not part of it.⁵²⁶ Neither were the Amboina islands—Hitu, Haruku, Honimoa, and Nusa Laut—which were nearly up against the coast of Seram.⁵²⁷ The people of these islands had ‘no merchandise’ and ‘no trade’.⁵²⁸

Continuous Javanese-Islamic influence, to which the Ternatens of the sixteenth century attributed all the good things they had, including their coinage, writing, religion, and law, is in evidence only in the second half of the fifteenth century.⁵²⁹ According to Pires’ information, Islam began in the Moluccas fifty years before he wrote, and the kings of all the islands were Muslims, ‘but not very involved in the sect,’ while ‘the heathen are three parts and more out of four . . . they are at war with one another most of the time . . . [and] they are almost all related.’⁵³⁰ The early Portuguese accounts of the Moluccas depict a community which still retained features reflecting an ancient Austronesian heritage.⁵³¹ Kinship ties and shared substances within the mythically defined world of Maluku underpinned the early Islamic order of the islands and made them more like Pacific polities rather than Indianized ones as found in the western parts of the Archipelago.⁵³² To what extent the Muslim rulers of the Moluccas could extend their rule beyond their own islands is not very clear. Traditions referring to the subjection of the ‘Papuawah’ islands by Moluccan rulers prior to the sixteenth century actually refer to the islands to the north and northwest of Irian Jaya, the Waigeo-Misool archipelago, or to Maba, Weda and Patani on Hal-mahera, and even the eastern part of the northeast coast of Seram and the eastcoast of that island.⁵³³ Valentijn narrates in his ‘Description

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 209; Corn, *Scents of Eden*, p. 26.

⁵²⁷ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, pp. 210–2; Duarte Barbosa, II, p. 199.

⁵²⁸ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 212.

⁵²⁹ Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 6.

⁵³⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 213.

⁵³¹ Andaya, *Maluku*, p. 248 and passim.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁵³³ Galis, ‘Geschiedenis’, pp. 4, 6, 17; A. Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw Guinea en de*

of Amboina' that the Papuas of Misool of old had settlements on the northcoast of Seram, from Hatoewé to Hote, while other Papuas who were settled more to the east and northeast of Hote, especially those of Weda and Salawatti, were hostile to those of Misool.⁵³⁴ How early exactly these different groups of Papuas had been established in these islands and by whom is not known, but but it is possible that slave raiding by the Sultans of Ternate played a role in it.

The Banda islands were a forested mini-archipelago of tiny volcanic and coral islands in the Banda Sea, to the south of Seram, with an early sixteenth-century population of probably no more than 3,000 people, and the unique source of nutmeg and its red filiamment mace.⁵³⁵ They appear to have produced little else; food supplies had to come from neighbouring islands.⁵³⁶ Banda, according to Pires, was 'something so small and weak that it is at the mercy of any junk that goes there, whether it be Javanese or Malayan.'⁵³⁷ Ludovico di Varthema, the first European who claimed to have set foot there, speaks of Banda as an 'isola molto brutta & trista,' whose inhabitants simply collected nutmegs from wild trees in the forests.⁵³⁸ Muslim Javanese traders, bringing cloth, had started to appear in Banda even more recently than in the Moluccas, not until the 1480s according to Pires.⁵³⁹ There were Muslim merchants on the seacoast, but the islands had no king and appear to have been ruled by a commercial oligarchy of elders.⁵⁴⁰

Papoesche Eilanden: Historische Bijdrage, 2 Delen (Batavia and 's-Gravenhage, 1884), *Deel I*, p. 17; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 208, note.

⁵³⁴ Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw Guinea*, I, p. 2.

⁵³⁵ Corn, *Scents of Eden*, p. xvii; Duarte Barbosa, II, pp. 196–8; Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 4; Andaya, *Maluku*, p. 1; Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 205.

⁵³⁶ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 208.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁵³⁸ Corn, *Scents of Eden*, p. 25; Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 7.

⁵³⁹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 205; Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 206.

⁵⁴⁰ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, I, p. 205; Reid, *Age of Commerce*, II, p. 208.

CONCLUSION

This third volume of *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World* has taken the reader from the late Mongol invasions to that critical period of transition between the end of the medieval period in the fifteenth century and the beginnings of early modern times in the sixteenth century. The materials on which it is based include a number of Portuguese sources—most importantly the accounts of Tomé Pires and Duarte Barbosa—but the subject of Portuguese expansion itself has received scant attention in it and will be reserved for the subsequent volume.

Essentially, the developments associated with the continued expansion of Islam in India and the lands of the Indian Ocean in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were a culmination of those which preceded them in the previous centuries. And to an extent, the current volume extends and deepens the analysis which has been offered in the second and first volumes of this work. Like the earlier volumes, this one pays little attention to religion as such. This is a subject that does not begin to receive extensive coverage in the sources until the subsequent centuries and will also be dealt with in more depth in volume IV. The current volume, however, attempts to break new ground by giving more systematic attention to the role of geography in the history of the area.

Whether this attempt to re-introduce geography in the history of the medieval Indian Ocean world has been at all successful should be left to the reader to judge. The aim of the book, in any case, has been to offer a broad new interpretation, while sidestepping almost entirely the already well-known narratives of military conquests, dynasties, and the often complex political events that can be found in abundance in the chronicles of the period. It develops as consistently as possible a new picture of India and the Indian Ocean or 'Indo-Islamic world' on the eve of the Portuguese discovery of the searoute: a world without stable parameters, of pervasive geophysical change, inchoate and unstable urbanism, highly volatile and itinerant elites of nomadic origin, far-flung merchant diasporas, and a famine- and disease-prone peasantry whose life was a gamble on the monsoon.

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